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SUDAN: NUMAYRI WRITES ON RELIGION,

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NEAR EAST/SOUTH ASIA REPORT

SUDAN: NUMAYRI WRITES ON RELIGION, POLITICS, SOCIETY

Cairo AL-NAHJ AL-ISLAMI LIMADHA in Arabic 1981, pp 11-38, 123-193, 279-309, 389-417, 419-458

[Introduction, chapters 4, 7, 10, 11 by Ja'far Muhammad Numayri from book "Why Pursue an Islamic Course?" published by al-Maktab al-Misri al-Hadith, 475 pages]

[Text] Religion and Life

In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate:

"And how should you not fight for the cause of Allah, and for the helpless old men, women, and children who say: 'Deliver us, Lord, from this city of wrongdoers; send forth to us a guardian from Your presence; send us one that will help us?'" [al-Nisa': iv. 75].

O, God Almighty, the world of the living, the nether world and the heavens sing your praises. The stars and the planets revolve in their orbits at your command, and the most supercilious are reduced to submission at the mention of Your name. You know what is happening now and what the future holds. You are privy to the secrets people harbor in their hearts and minds. You are the King of Kings and to You everything shall revert. You can grant people forgiveness and mercy; You can command them and reward them. It is to You that people return. People come to life and die by Your command. You are indispensable to the two worlds. You are Merciful and Mighty; Supreme and Most Holy. You are evident peace. Blessed are Your names and exalted in the minds and hearts of men are Your qualities. How indispensable You are to all of creation! No beast moves in this world without Your command: its life is bestowed by Your might; its life is set by Your measure; and its death is determined by You. You make the day follow the night, and You make the night follow the day. You set the orbits for the sun, the moon and the stars, and You reward people who do good deeds with property and livestock they can enjoy and with which they can enrich their lives. The mind marvels at Your creation: the land is flat; the mountains are high and pointed; the sky is held up without support; and the stars provide light and ornamentation. You breathed life into the dead earth and it grew vegetation that was enjoyed for a time. Exalted is Your wisdom, the Wisest of the wise. When Your judgment befalls someone, it is the Most Fair of the fair. Your forgiveness is swift, and You are the Most Merciful of the merciful. Your forgiveness only comes before Your wrath. O, God Almighty, the penitent find recourse in singing your praises.

[III - NE&A - 121]

Compared with His omnipotence this is an extremely limited view of the Creator. A creature who has been created in the Almighty's vast scheme of things is not the master of his fate: he does not determine the course of his life and the time of his death; and he does not control his happiness or his misery. He would not be able to determine whether he will stray from the True Religion or embrace it had it not been for the mercy of God Who blessed man with the ability to reason, to feel, to see and to hear. Those who seek divine guidance, will find it for themselves, and those who stray from divine guidance, will go astray. Allah can surely do without them.

Wherefore then the message and the messengers? Wherefore then were people exhorted to turn to God and to pray? Why then were the Book of Psalms, the Torah, the Bible and the Koran sent to man?

Wherefore then was the exhortation to turn to God made by Abraham and Moses? Wherefore then was the exhortation to turn to God made by Mary's son, 'Abdallah's son and by other prophets, messengers and Israelites? Were their exhortations merely appeals to people urging them to worship no other god but Allah and to accept for themselves no other protector or champion?

Were the messengers' missions, the prophets' exhortations and the revealed books of God reminders of what is perceived by the mind and the heart as well as by one's sense of sight and hearing? Were they reminders of the fact that creatures are bound to a Creator whose qualities are even more exalted than the qualities they describe? The power of the Creator is not less than that of a creature; his power is not equal to that of a creature; nor is His course and destiny like that of a creature.

Have people's minds become so dense that they are unable to comprehend that ephemeral phenomena like the sun, inanimate objects like idols and those who are lost in the ashes of nothingness are like fire? Are people unable to comprehend that these things do not have the power to hurt themselves or to do good to themselves to warrant that they be considered protectors and guardians?

Have people's hearts and minds been inattentive, failing to recognize their own weaknesses when it became clear to them that all people are subject to sickness and health, powerlessness and power, and life and death? Did they fail to recognize this when they deified some people and turned a deaf ear to their Supreme God?

God has created nothing but perfection. A creature's instinct is the work of the Creator who bestowed life on man only because he can distinguish virtue from sin and right from wrong and he can reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth and on his own creation, maybe people will understand.

Wherefore then did those who exhort people to turn to God do so? Wherefore were the messengers' missions? Were these exhortations to people to have faith, or were they appeals to fight tyranny?

Were these appeals to fight the tyranny that dominates man by subjugating him? If man yields to such tyranny, he becomes like a domesticated and grazing animal. He may even sink lower than that if he acquiesces to ignorance as he acquiesces to

injustice. He will yield to error as he yields to tyranny. To such a man right and wrong become indistinguishable: he would not see what he sees; he would not hear what he hears and he would not accept in his heart anything but that which he is supposed to accept. If he is told that the stones are gods, he will worship them even though he was the one who fashioned them and even though he understands that they are quite powerless. This, however, is the will of tyranny: if an idol catches fire, it cannot provide knowledge; it cannot provide warmth; nor can it provide light. Nevertheless, man sings its praises and prays to it for shelter, protection and deliverance even though he is the one who lights that fire and extinguishes it. All this is the will of tyranny.

If a human being becomes a tyrant, he ceases to be like other human beings, born of a woman, and he declares himself the son of the sun or a deity.

This is how tyranny clouds man's understanding so that his eyes, tongue and lips become useless to him. People are no longer guided by their minds and hearts, and they are no longer protected by their sense of sight and their understanding. They wander about in error as the slaves of slaves and the pawns of inanimate objects. They become prisoners of their own delusions, floundering between an ephemeral sun, a dying fire and an oppressive tyrant.

How then can man regain his true nature? It is man's true nature that guides him in his finite existence to his Infinite Creator. It is man's true nature that rescues him from the confusion of error and guides him to the security of certainty; it rescues him from the torment of being lost and guides him to the haven of faith. There can be no way, no road and no rescue from error, disbelief and idolatry unless the roots of these evils are uprooted. There can be no liberation from delusions unless the will is liberated. True guidance is the only way to fight error, and there can be no guidance and no true religion unless tyranny is overcome. When the state of tyranny becomes a thing of the past, when tyranny ceases to dominate and falls, its magic ceases to work. People follow a false religion when they worship false gods; and they stray from the right path as a result of their immorality. Ignorance is the twin of injustice which adds fire and fuel to ignorance; it is its bulwark and its cornerstone. Ignorance is nothing but a denial of the light of God's Guidance. Control by idols has only been established in iniquitous and immoral countries. It is only a tyrant who will promote idolatry in his country. It is only the unjust and the tyrannical who claim divinity. Why then do people remain blind? Why is it that people harden their hearts? Why is it that people cannot distinguish truth from sin, right from wrong and true religion from false religion? Why is it that people do not rely on their natural instincts?

This is because people are living in countries of iniquity and immorality. It is because they are living under tyranny and injustice. It is because they cannot overcome immorality, iniquity, injustice and tyranny.

If they were able to overcome immorality, iniquity, injustice and tyranny, their minds and hearts would be enlightened by faith, and they would not worship anyone but God.

This was God's exhortation to His prophets and messengers. This was the exhortation that was made to people from the days of Ibrahim to the days of Muhammad,

may God bless him and grant him salvation. This was the appeal made by those prophets and messengers who preceded both Ibrahim and Muhammad. It was an appeal to overcome tyranny, resist injustice and liberate people from oppression.

It was an appeal for a new way of life that would be based on justice, kindness, charity and piety. It was an appeal by means of which man could be liberated from the oppression of an unjust ruler. This would come about if the unjust ruler is divested of the means of his oppression and if the oppressed are liberated from the reasons for their submission.

This is how the verses of the Esteemed and Wise God delineated the first steps Ibrahim took in his appeal to divest the unjust of the rationale for their injustice, force the unjust to admit their powerlessness, and divest the unjust of the symbols of their tyranny. Subsequent steps would become easy.

"We bestowed guidance on Ibrahim, for We knew him well. He said to his father and to his people: 'What are these images to which you are so devoted?'

"They replied, 'Our fathers worshipped them.'

"He said: 'Then you and your fathers were in the grossest error.'

"Is it the truth that you are preaching,' they asked, 'or is this but a jest?'

"Know, then,' he answered, 'that your Lord is the Lord of the heavens and the earth. It was He that made them: to this I bear witness. By the Lord, I will overthrow your idols as soon as you have turned your backs.'

"He broke them all in pieces, except their supreme god, so that they might return to Him.

"Who has done this to our deities?' asked some. 'He must surely be a wicked man.'

"Others replied: 'We have heard a youth called Ibrahim speak of them.'

"They said: 'Then bring him here in sight of all the people, that they may act as witnesses.'

"Ibrahim,' they said, 'was it you who did this to our deities?'

"No,' he replied. 'It was their chief who smote them. Ask them, if they can speak.'

"Thereupon they turned their thoughts to their own folly and said to each other: 'Surely you are sinful men.'" [al-Anbiya': xxi. 51-64]

This is how an exhortation to turn to God preceded certainty and paved the way for it. It divested the unjust of the symbols of their tyranny.

Injustice was confronted by challenging it. Its magic vanished; its mask was uncovered; delusions ceased; and truth was revealed. Nothing was left of the idols but ruins and broken fragments. The unjust could do nothing but face up to an

admission of their own impotence after the destruction of their symbols. After that practicing the faith was easy!

The symbols of tyranny and injustice that Ibrahim confronted were confronted by Lot. These were practices that violated other practices; these were iniquitous and immoral laws. Lot confronted a society whose people were unjust. How did his appeal fare?

Did it turn away from a confrontation with the iniquities of the unjust, or did it confront them face to face?

The Koran summarizes the confrontation as related by Lot and his people [as follows]:

"[Lot said to them]: '...Will you fornicate with males and leave your wives, whom Allah has created for you? Surely you are great transgressors.'

"[Lot,] they replied, 'desist or you shall be banished.' [al-Shu'ara': xxvi. 165-167].

This appeal, as plain as a straight path, was aimed at the destruction of evil and the eradication of the seats of iniquity, depravity and tyranny. This was the course it pursued to achieve its aim. This was the course it pursued to attain what it sought. This is because the road to the True Religion is the road to divine guidance, and that cannot be found when people are engaged in erroneous practices and when they espouse those practices either because they are made to submit to them or because they adhere to them [voluntarily].

Indeed, this is an exhortation to turn to Truth. Its cornerstones, however, are not based on the power of its advocate, but rather on the responsiveness of those to whom the exhortation is being made. If they respond, Truth will find its way to them. If they display arrogance, justice will be carried out against them. The light of faith will not find its way to those whose understanding has been clouded by the dark clouds of iniquity, depravity and aggression. Proof, like the light of the sun, cannot break through these dark clouds. This is because darkness [of the soul] breeds injustice. For such people no relatives by marriage or blood can intercede on their behalf. Those who will be saved are those who chose the true religion and spurned the way of error.

The eradication of injustice then is inescapable. If the tenets of the faith cannot be established under tyranny, its destruction then becomes inescapable.

The Esteemed Wise One says, "And when Our messengers brought Ibrahim the good news they said: 'We are about to destroy the people of this town, for they are wicked men.'

"Ibrahim said, 'Lot dwells in it.'

"We all know who live in it,' they replied. 'We shall deliver him and all his kinsfolk, except his wife, who shall remain behind.'" [al-'Ankabut: xxix.31-33].

This is the fate of tyranny when it clashes with truth. In fact, this is how

every appeal that is made for truth begins. In fact, it is the reason for it. Have we not heard God's address to Moses when He charged him with a mission and gave him a command that was accompanied by the reason for that command? [God Almighty said], "Go to Pharaoh; he has transgressed all bounds." [Taha: xx.24].

This then was a confrontation of tyranny. It was a mission whose essence was opposition to the injustice of oppressors and to coercion by the powerful.

"He called to Moses, saying: 'Go to those wicked people, the people of Pharaoh. [al-Shu'ara': xxvi.10].

God has determined in His revealed book the aspects as well as the crimes of injustice. These were determined to be the targets of the mission. In fact, they were the reasons behind the mission.

"Moses said to his people: 'Remember Allah's goodness to you when He delivered you from Pharaoh's people, who had oppressed you cruelly, putting your sons to death and sparing your daughters. Surely that was a great trial from your Lord' [Ibrahim: xiv.6].

God Almighty knows what people harbor in their hearts. He knows about the fear people feel in their hearts from the tyranny of oppressors, even if their hearts had been inclined to accept faith.

This is because it is people's ability to stand firm and endure hardships and harm, their ability to confront, challenge and resist as well as their ability to put the soul to a test and make it stand firm, inflexible, undaunted and unyielding that prepares them for accepting faith. People find their way to faith through an ability to tame the spirit so it would not slacken, not retreat and not go back on a promise.

The ability that is required in one who advocates the cause of God is one that does not stop with the ability to exhort people to turn to God. It is an ability that parallels the ability to overcome the injustice inflicted upon people and the injustice people inflict upon themselves because they yield to the unjust and surrender to his tyranny. God is the Omniscient, Wise Creator of the universe. Nothing is hidden from him. People cannot hide what they harbor in their hearts from Him.

God did not charge Moses with the mission that He entrusted to him until after He helped Moses discover that His powers exceeded the powers of all others and that His wrath caused all blessings to vanish. Moses was thus able to confront the unjust supported by the right of power and the power of truth.

God the Merciful spoke to Moses and said, "'What is it you are carrying in your left hand, Moses?'

"He replied: 'It is my staff; upon it I lean and with it I beat down the leaves for my flock. It has other uses besides.'

"He said, 'Moses, cast it down.'

"Moses threw it down, and thereupon it turned into a scurrying serpent.

"Take it up and do not be alarmed," He said. "We will change it back to its former state. Now put your hand under your armpit. It shall come out white, although unharmed. This shall be another sign. But before long We shall show you the most wondrous of all Our signs" [Taha: xx.17-23].

Then after that God gave Moses a command. Moses was ordered to "Go to Pharaoh; he has transgressed all bounds" [Taha: xx.24].

These are the miraculous signs in the lives of prophets and messengers. God the Merciful did not intend them to be signs of His capabilities nor proof of His power. He rather wanted to break the spell that had been cast upon people by oppressors, those who think that by oppressing people and holding them under their power, they become more powerful than everybody else.

This was how the son of Mary healed the deaf, the mute and the blind. This was how he brought the dead back to life. He did that with God's permission. People therefore talked about him, and he was surrounded by disciples despite coercion by the Romans and oppression by the Israelites.

The True God only intended to have these miracles fortify the spirits of the oppressed so they would be able to face the unjust. If they are able to do that, the light of faith would find its way to them and envelop them. If their power wanes or their numbers diminish, then God Almighty turns the injustice committed by the unjust against them, and then the doors to faith are flung wide open.

God Almighty says, "Have you not heard how Allah dealt with Aad? The people of the many-columned city of Iram, whose like has never been built in the whole land?

"And with Thamoud, who hewed out their dwellings among the rocks of the valley?

"And with Pharaoh, who impaled his victims upon the stake?

"They had all led sinful lives and made the land teem with wickedness. Therefore your Lord let loose on them the scourge of His punishment; for from His Eminence He observes all" [al-Fajr: lxxxix. 6-14].

Religion then is not an appeal from heaven to turn to heaven. Religion is not detached from what is happening on earth. In fact the afterlife is connected to life on this earth. The doors to the gardens of paradise which have been prepared for the pious, for those who mention God often and who sing His praises frequently are opened wide to those who had their chance in this world.

They had their chance in this world in the justice they pursued and advocated. They had their chance to resist injustice and refrain from unjust practices. Those are the people who are kind and merciful to others and who enjoin people to do good and order them to shun evil.

These were the missions and the appeals made by the messengers. These missions were not missions that pertained to the heavens and ignored earth. They did not seek the justice of the Creator and ignore justice for His creatures. They did

not renounce the small pleasures of the world in favor of the blessings of the afterlife. These missions and appeals addressed themselves to people's affairs seeking their reform. They did not ignore small details, nor did they overlook major ones. These missions and appeals confirmed the divine statement that anyone who seeks divine justice should strive to establish justice among people. Anyone who hopes to receive the Creator's mercy should be merciful himself with other creatures. Anyone who advocates truth, should see to it that truth is realized among people.

These were the missions of Ibrahim, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad. These were the exhortations of Noah, Salih and Lot. These were the objectives of Sulayman, Dawud and Shu'ayb.

The God of all Creation says this: "Shu'ayb had said to them: 'Will you not have fear of Allah? I am indeed your true apostle. Fear Allah, then, and follow me. I demand of you no recompense: none can reward me except the Lord of the Creation' [al-Shu'ara': xxvi. 177-180].

Shu'ayb, may the peace of God be with him, defines truthfully the nature of obedience to God and piety. He spoke truthfully when he said, "Give just measure and defraud none. Weigh with even scales and do not cheat others of what is rightly theirs; nor corrupt the land with evil" [al-Shu'ara': xxvi. 182-183].

The Merciful God addresses His best and last prophet defining for him the course his appeal to people should take and telling him facts about the missions of the messengers so as to clarify to him the objective of his appeal to people and the objectives of the mission.

This is an appeal that clashes with injustice even if injustice were armed with force. It is an appeal that champions the victims of injustice even if they use weakness and meekness to protect themselves. It is an appeal for justice because it is justice: it is the law of God.

It was God Who sent Moses to pharaoh. What did pharaoh have? He had what God and His messengers disavow; he had what God condemned in His books; he had what God dreaded for His powerless worshippers.

The Wise One addresses His messenger and believers and says, "Ta sin min. These are the revelations of the Glorious Book. In all truth We shall recount to you some of the history of Moses and Pharaoh for the instruction of the faithful.

"Now Pharaoh made himself a tyrant in the land. He divided his people into castes, one group of which he persecuted, putting their sons to death and sparing their daughters. Truly, he was an evil-doer" [al-Qasas: xxviii. 1-4].

This is what God thinks of those who divide people into castes, spread terror in their midst, rob them of their security and take those lives that God forbade taking without due cause.

This is the appeal that calls for pharaoh's punishment. This is the mission of the messenger. Both he and those with him have to overcome their weakness with faith. They have to fortify their steadfastness with certainty, and they have to

agree on the truth. After being weak, they will become leaders and they will be the ones to inherit the earth.

This is what the Truthful One has promised if those who have been unjustly treated rise up against those who were unjust to them--and this would be just--and if people agree on things that are not sinful. This was the message that the messenger was given; the message was not intended to him.

God's revealed verses say: "But it was Our will to favor those who were oppressed and to make them leaders of mankind, to bestow on them a noble heritage and to give them power in the land; and to inflict on Pharaoh, Haman, and their army, the very scourge dreaded by their victims" [al-Qasas: xxviii. 5-6].

This has been the course of the appeal to turn to God ever since that appeal began, when your God wished to have a successor on Earth.

The course of the appeal to turn to God has been one that looks for justice where there is injustice, strives for truth where there is falsehood, and champions the downtrodden where there is fear. The course of the appeal to turn to God involves the immanence and mercy of God; it involves friendship, congeniality and working together to do good and pious deeds and spurn sinful and aggressive behavior. The course of the appeal to turn to God involves striving to bring about change for the better; it involves an effort to bring about a more perfect justice and to renounce falsehood, idolatry, godlessness, errant conduct and slander.

Ever since its beginnings, the appeal to turn to God was never just an appeal to worship no god but Allah; nor was it just an appeal to pray to God as an expression of faith in Him and as a manifestation of one's recognition of the power of the Powerful Creator. God does not need that. Everything on Earth and in the heavens sings His praises. The appeal to turn to God rather enjoined people to be kind to others as they professed their faith, and to be just and equitable as they yielded themselves to God. As they sang God's praises people were asked not to boast about their descent; not to dominate others with their money; not to exult in their sins; not to be chauvinistic; and not to gain power through tyranny or through outrageous conduct.

People are equal like the teeth of a comb. They are equal in their quest for shelter and equitable protection under the banner of a declaration of faith. The value of their personal possessions is not to be diminished; their property is not to be seized unlawfully; their standards are not to be disturbed; and their inviolable objects are not to be violated. People can find protection only in their good deeds. Kinship does not protect them from punishment. Who was closer to Noah than his son? And yet Noah's son drowned. Who was closer to Lot than his wife? But because of her errant ways, she was one of those who turned to dust. No one was closer to God's mercy as Pharaoh's wife was: she sought impartial protection from injustice, and God wanted her to be an example to people.

"But to the faithful Allah has set an example in Pharaoh's wife, who said: 'Lord, build me a house with You in Paradise and deliver me from Pharaoh and his misdeeds. Deliver me from a wicked nation'" [al-Tahrim: lxvi. 11].

This has been the norm with [divine] messages, and this has been the course of

God's messengers: to uproot that which is based on injustice and to strive to bring about that which is based on justice. Faith in God is nothing but accepting His justice. God's justice is nothing but a manifestation of His mercy toward people. It is a mercy they strive for in His land and among His worshipers.

This was the case with the son of 'Abdallah, the last of the prophets and messengers and the most honorable of all mankind, may God bless him and grant him salvation.

His appeal encountered nothing but injustice, and his mission sought nothing but justice. The powerless in the world had nothing but those things they yearned for and were unable to attain.

The appeal to turn to God was made in a society where a human being was deemed to be someone if he was of noble descent, if he was wealthy, if he was the neighbor of an honorable man, if he was related to the highborn, if he was sinful and licentious, and if he was haughty and powerful. Other people were deemed animals.

Dignity and honor did not matter.

A person's good name and honor did not matter.

People could not support themselves without having humiliation added to the sweat of their brows.

People were barely able to clothe themselves. But their lack of clothing was due to the fact that they were needy; it was not due to the licentiousness that was behind the scanty clothing worn by their shameless leaders.

Nothing holds people to life in that society but the humiliation of submission. Their only protection comes from those with whom they took refuge. If those who were protecting them wanted them killed, they would be killed, and if they wanted their lives spared, they would be allowed to live. If they wanted to, they could own the powerless, body and soul. They owned their sons and their daughters. Each one of these masters had loaned their proteges money. Not only did he collect the amount of the loan, but he collected double the amount. The debt would double each time payment was due. If the borrower was unable to pay back his debt, the lender became delighted since he took from the borrower what was more valuable than money. The borrower became enslaved to the lender, and the borrower's wife, mother or daughter became pawns used by the moneylender, his shameless friends and everyone who sought the company of a woman for pay. Thus, payment made for such pleasures would go to the moneylender, and the borrower's honor would be used to pay back the debt.

All this took place in an environment that valued kinship and descent so highly, it almost revered them. It was an environment that protected honor with what was dearer than blood, life and death. It was an environment that valued sons, fathers, grandfathers, grandsons and great grandsons. It was an environment that saw its strength only in terms of its numbers. So much so that those who were dead and buried were added to the number of those who were living in the hope that those added numbers would make a society more invulnerable.

In such a community what would be left for a human being if his honor were defiled?

This was a community where need was synonymous with degradation and poverty was synonymous with slavery. This was a community where a man's debt would be paid back in terms of his wife's, mother's, daughter's or sister's honor. It was a community where poor, humiliated people lived in fear of the law of those bestial people in that community. These were people who killed girls at birth because they feared the imminent dishonor that would eventually come to their doorstep.

And why shouldn't they anticipate time and terminate the life of a new-born girl in her cradle so that moral turpitude would not defile the misfortune of their toil?

Their mournful wanderings wore them out, and mourning and consolation gave them no relief.

Those figures of stone were nothing but custodians for the unjust. They were their pledge to tyranny and their access to moral depravity. They provided the scene where nothing that was licit was traded. To the unjust even the sacred house of Ibrahim was nothing but a place where goods could be bought or sold. It was a place of amusement which they would frequent at trying times. Then when times were good, they would turn away from it. On the day a battle with the army of the Elephant* was fought, none of them resisted but 'Abd-al-Muttalib, the old patriarch of the Hashim tribe. The old man used his own power and the power of faith in the Lord to resist. He sought God's protection at the hour of need, and the Lord protected him.

Because pre-Islamic days were days of ignorance, because the unjust are blind and tyrants are deaf, they did not understand that the Ethiopians were attacking them when the Ethiopians attacked them, nor did they understand the failure of the Ethiopians when the Ethiopians were routed. They did not perceive the miracle which God wanted them to become aware of. They went back to alcohol and gambling; they went back to their usury and cynicism; they went back to their tyranny and oppression; and they continued to strip the powerless and the poor in their midst of what they held dear in their lives and of the fruits of their labors.

This is what Muhammad devoted himself to. This is what the son of 'Abdallah had to resist. This is what the orphan was destined to fight against, and this is what he put an end to with God's permission and with the victory that God had promised His faithful worshipers.

How did tyranny back off in front of his words? How did institutions of injustice fall back and crumble in front of him? How was he able to regain for the slave his freedom? How was he able to regain the integrity of the nation and the sanctity of honor? How was he able to give a female child who used to be killed at

* Translator's note: According to N.J. Dawood in a footnote to his translation of "Al-Fil," (lvi) this is an allusion to the expedition launched by Arabha, the Christian king of Ethiopia, against Mecca. This expedition is supposed to have taken place the year Muhammad was born.

birth her right to a life free of the degradation of being deprived of what was dearer than life?

How was he able to preserve those lives when taking those lives without due cause was forbidden by God? How was he able to do away with gambling? How was he able to ban the consumption of alcohol, which impairs people's reason and their mental faculties?

How did he legitimize selling and eradicate usury? How was he able to establish for beggars and for the deprived a well-known right that would give them more money than what was needed for the subsistence of their children? How was he able to make the property of orphans a sacred trust that no usurpers could get? How was he able to determine with justice the shares of fathers, sons, wives, mothers, brothers, sisters and relatives?

How was he able to protect families from being trifled with by carnal appetites? He prohibited practices that people had sanctioned for themselves in their misguided ways. He forbade men from marrying their mothers, sisters, aunts, step-daughters and stepmothers. He forbade them from marrying two sisters at the same time. [If they married more than one woman], they had to treat their wives equally, and if they were not able to treat their wives equally, they were to marry one woman only.

How was he able to instill the value of work in the hearts of those masters who had thought that work was the lot of slaves?

How did he instill in people whose only preoccupation was their own amusement an aversion to obstinacy and unemployment? Those people labored only in the pursuit of their own carnal pleasures.

How did he fight them, and then how did he fight with them against injustice, godlessness, sinfulness and ignorance? Before he came, none of them had fallen victim to anything but his own carnal pleasures and whims. Those who fought to hold on to their sins, their obstinacy and their pride were slain by obstinate, proud sinners.

How did he enlighten people and open their hearts to certainty and to the will to believe, thus making them desist after being weak, unite after being divided, and agree after being enemies? The world was under their power, and thrones and crowns fell under the feet of their horses.

How did he motivate people and give them the will to travel the desert and sail the seas? How did he motivate them to fight, die, champion and triumph for the declaration that there is no god but Allah?

He did what God commanded him to do. He took the side of the powerless who were a minority, and he protected the unjust who were weak. He fought against tyrants, and there were many of them, and he fought against those who exploit others and whose only strength comes from the fact that people submit to them. Injustice can be found only where the powerless submit to its rule. Let us refer to the first people who supported Muhammad's exhortation to people to adopt Islam.

One of them was Bilal ibn Rabah al-Habashi whose father was an Ethiopian. His mother, Hamamah, was an Ethiopian prisoner, and he belonged to Ummayah ibn Khalaf. He saw the first signs of the freedom he had been longing for in the messenger's appeal. He became a Muslim, and he was subjected to painful torture. He withstood the torture with the steadfastness of those who would not give up their liberty for life.

Another one of Muhammad's early supporters was 'Ammar ibn Yasir. His father and his mother were also supporters. The noble prophet was speaking of them when he said, "Patience, ye who are the kin of Yasir. You have been promised Paradise."

They endured torture such as that which no other human being had endured. 'Ammar withstood the torture, but Yasir did not. He died. 'Amr ibn Hisham, [alias] Abu Jahl took the life of Yasir's mother stealthily in a manner that only those like him would know. He neither stabbed her in the chest nor in the back; nor did he shoot his spear in her neck or her heart. He killed her by shooting his spear where free women guard their honor with their lives. She was the first woman to die for the True Religion. Her death continued to trouble Muslims until the day of [the battle of] Badr when 'Amr ibn Hisham was killed by the swords of those fighting for the truth. The messenger of God said, "He was the pharaoh of this nation."

Another one of the prophet's early supporters was Khibab ibn al-Irth who belonged to Siba' ibn al-Qura al-Khuzama. He too was tortured because he became a Muslim, but he withstood the torture and survived it. He [later] emigrated with the messenger and took part in the battles that were fought for Islam.

Yet another one of the prophet's early supporters is Sahib ibn Sinan al-Rumi, a Roman prisoner. Another one was 'Amir ibn Fahirah, an associate of al-Tufayl ibn 'Abdallah al-Azdi. Still another supporter was Abu Nakihah who was a slave to Safwan ibn Umayyah.

There were slaves among the earliest women supporters of Islam. Labibah, Zanirah, al-Nahdiyah and Umm 'Abis were among those supporters.

Those were the men and women whose hearts were opened to Islam in its earliest days.

Those were the early supporters of Islam. They supported the prophet at a time when the godless were after him, seeking to harm him. At that time he did not have the power to protect them or the funds with which he could ransom them. But he was on their side because he was one of them: he was hoping for justice, and his honesty made him more determined to seek justice so he appealed for justice and he seized it.

But the messenger had upset these people's values, values that had prevailed in pre-Islamic days. He thereby upset value systems that non-believers thought would remain in effect.

Under Islam slaves were no longer slaves, and being a master was no longer restricted to those who could claim descent from the highborn and kinship to them as well as wealth.

People became their own masters, and they regained their self-respect by believing in God. In the new Islamic society a person's worth depended on his good deeds, but those who were godless, tyrannical and corrupt fell to the lowest rung of society. This is a religion where truth and justice converge. This is a law that classifies people according to their deeds.

This is a doctrine where people are equal inasmuch as their faith is equal. The more they offer in this life for the afterlife, the greater their worth.

This new classification of people under the new faith is codified in the noble verses of the Koran.

"When it is said to them: 'Do not commit evil in the land,' they reply: 'We do nothing but good.' But it is they who are the evil-doers, though they may not perceive it.

"And when it is said to them: 'Believe as others believe,' they reply: 'Are we to believe as fools believe?' It is they who are the fools, if they but knew it!" [al-Baqarah: ii.11-13].

This was Muhammad's exhortation to people, and those were his powerless followers on Earth.

It was a seed to change values that had become established. It constituted the earliest signs for codifying new relations that were not governed by money, kinship, descent or tribalism. A new structure was being built as the structures of falsehood were tumbling down. Unjust formulae were becoming unbalanced, and just standards were being set up. Steps were being taken on a long road that God wanted and had charged His messenger with. God wanted these steps taken so people would feel secure after having been fearful; so they would become united after having been divided; so they would vouch for each other after having struggled with each other; so that they would be rightly equal with nothing to discriminate between them except for that which separates day from night. One is clear and bright, and the other dark and murky. Only people's actions will separate them: the actions they take in this life for the afterlife. This is the essence of the exhortation, every exhortation. This was the course of the mission, every mission, from Ibrahim to the prophet Muhammad. This was the course of the mission before Noah, and after Adam, may the peace of God be with him. This is also a course provided to those who believe in God, in His book and in His messengers. It is provided to anyone who came to know Islam and became known to Islam; to anyone who embraced Islam and adhered to it; to anyone who read the Koran and the tradition of the prophet, to anyone who drew the inspiration for his life from the life of the prophet and the inspiration for his effort from the prophet's effort and from the messenger's objectives and the messenger's mode. That person, with God's will, will attain what he set out to attain.

A person is to strive to attain in his life what the earliest pious believers attained. He is not to be content with the unjust, and he is not to be satisfied with what is false. He is to strive for what is right and to yearn for what is good. When he sees people who are distressed, he is not to think that his duty to His God is just to pray, to pay the alms tax and to adhere to his religious duties.

Instead, he has to try....

If he attains what God and His messenger wanted him to attain, then he will receive his reward. But if his efforts fall short of making him attain his objectives, then he will be indebted to God.

I have done my best, and I am still trying.

With God's grace I hope I have not been unfair to myself. It is in God's hands that I put myself, and it is to Him that I turn repentantly.

Chapter Four

And then the Road Appeared!

"If we returned to the faith from which Allah has delivered us, we should be false to our Lord; nor can we turn to it again except by the will of Allah, our Lord. He has knowledge of all things, and in Him we have put our trust. Lord, judge rightly between us and our people; You are the best of judges'." [al-A'raf: vii.89].

The end of treachery was the beginning.

It was a beginning that surpassed what had preceded it. Even on the eve of the march which was the anniversary of the birth of the True Religion, ambitions were noble, and the road was as plain as certainty.

The objectives were formulated in studies, and the steps that were to be taken were precisely defined.

And the stages--what about the stages? We will storm the seat where the problem has been hiding. And we will not have to wait long before the white flag is raised. What was required has been achieved.

People are living in disunity even though they understand its implications and complications for their present and their future and even though they groan under its pressing weight.

People Are the Government.

At their gatherings people talk about their suffering. They talk about sectarianism and partisanship. They talk about the game of musical chairs in the cabinet and in parliament. They talk about ambitions, deals and maneuvers that set up a government and bring about its downfall overnight. They talk about pressures from abroad, alliances inside the country and foreign influence spreading its dark shadows and leaving its fingerprints behind every disagreement or coalition. They talk about what they hear but what they do not understand in the major leagues.

They talk about nationalism and about internationalism. They talk about becoming dependent on the East or becoming dependent on the West. They talk about their role in achieving international balance, and they talk about their absence from

projects that are designed to fill the vacuum in the area. They talk about what they hear, and they compare their lives.

They are citizens of a country whose political boundaries have been defined from Nimule to Halfa and from al-Janinah to the Red Sea. But what is going on behind those borders? Are the people united in their feelings? Have they closed their ranks? Have they become united behind the objective of building this huge and proud country?

Every day someone from the south or from the north who lost his life in battle is buried. Both the southern native and the northern native are victims, but who is the enemy?

Both victims fight under the same flag. Both victims are citizens of the same country. However, they oppose each other in battle, and they die. How can this reasoning be consistent with people from the same homeland, the same soil and the same destiny?

In the south people talk dolefully about the north.

And in the north people talk mournfully about the south.

People recall when colonialists imposed on the country a policy of closed zones, blocking roads between various areas. That was what the conquering foreigner wanted. Communications between various areas were forbidden because that was what colonialists wanted and because they had the wherewithal to achieve what they wanted. Now that the colonialists are gone and our will has been liberated, who is it that used bloodshed and fire to block the road to communications? Who is it that turned the joy of a reunion between fellow citizens to a bloody clash that has taken its toll over days, months and years? It were as though this bloody feud was drawing upon pent-up, undying resentment to grow.

Independence was declared, and the murderous drain began. Governments followed each other in office after independence, but that feud continued to grow.

People became preoccupied with that feud. When it became chronic, people became chronically bitter. It were as though a person who tolerates a malady in his body will surely die from it.

At first, the question of the south would usually hold a prominent position on governments' agendas when new governments took office and when they left office. In most cases, months or weeks later, interest in that question would fade. People would compare governments' enthusiasm for the question of the south when a government took office with its concerns at the end of its term in office. People would always find that the question of the south was the question of the hour, but only in the first hours of a government's term. After that and until it left office the question of the south would fade from memory, and the government would not remember it unless it came back to office.

The opposition, which has always been the previous government or the next one, has always been preoccupied with the south. It would discuss details of the question, propose solutions, define steps, make contacts, hold conferences and maintain its enthusiasm for the question until its turn would come around for holding

office. Then it would forget all its promises and ignore all the pledges it had made. Because people are the same everywhere and because they do not change when they change their positions, the cycle of rising and declining enthusiasm and making promises and not keeping them caused everyone to despair that any serious action will be taken by the government--any government. Everyone despaired that the government would come up with a total solution for the question of fire and bloodshed.

And what about the media? What did they offer?

The fervor of the ongoing struggle in the capital between parties made it unnecessary for the media to sensationalize what they could in the ongoing drama in the south. Their preoccupation with the question of the state made them ignore the question of the homeland; and their preoccupation with the questions of division made them ignore the question of unity.

People Were the Government.

At their gatherings people talked about the fact that what was happening in the south was not a major bane and that it would rather lead to more serious afflictions.

People were recalling their ancestors.

Relations of kinship and successive generations do not constitute the blood ties that flow in people's arteries. These relations are that continuous medium through which values, ideas and history are transmitted to generations of people.

The history of the people's ancestors is the glory of their present days. They use it to compare the present with the past. Through it they measure their ability to forge the future. Their ancestors were the ones who fought in Karair, Shekan, Sinkat, Qababah, Darfur, Kordofan, Bahr al-Ghazal and the Province of Equatoria. It was their grandfathers who foiled the passage of (Takrif) in the east on the same day Hicks' campaign in the west was routed.

It was their ancestors who founded Sudanese nationalism. They were the ones who forged the unity of the Sudanese nation with blood, sacrifice, initiative, conviction and faith.

Those were their ancestors! What a difference between their past and their present! What a difference between those who are living under division and those great ancestors who forged the unity of the country, defended it and emphasized relations, integration and homogeneity for all of Sudan, from the east to the south and from the west to the north.

The ancestors of the Sudanese people united around a heroic idea, but their descendants became divided aimlessly when their leaders' ambitions divided them.

The People Were the Government.

Because people realized that there were 1,000 reasons for the malady, the feuds among leaders became feuds among sects, and these soon became feuds among

regions. These feuds created seats from which the dangers of division broke out. Sectarianism was not the product of ideas interacting in dialogue. It turned into something with areas of influence that grew as followers grew and shrank as followers declined. People would agree about whom they opposed and whom they fought against. But because sectarianism was determined by the followers of a sect and not by that sect's ideas, the followers of one sect in their areas opposed the followers of another sect in another area. This sectarianism was thus fortified with regionalism. This sectarianism heightened and intensified differences in ethnic origins. Because political parties were a front for sects, they were involved in every feud. In fact, they were the ones that started every feud. A political dimension was thus added to justify people's regional attitudes which were backed and sustained by ethnic attitudes.

The People Were the Government.

At their gatherings people sensed that the civil strife was heating up and that it was being fueled by the sources of backwardness. Neglect heated up the civil strife.

As governments succeeded each other into office after independence, differences between cities and provinces grew. In some areas people were hungry, and in some areas people were thirsty. In some areas life was as backward as it was in pre-historic times. Because the cities were false fronts for an unjust situation, the deprived were attracted to them. They came to these cities without support, and they found nothing there but injustice and indigence.

This was how the provinces and their residents experienced the injustice of backwardness. The provinces felt the injustice that was inflicted on those who left them and then returned to them. These people did not have the sense of security that comes with a sense of belonging to a province.

The People Were the Government.

As people watched time go by and as they saw and heard the signs of progress being made around them--the High Dam was built in Egypt and thousands of factories were being built there--they realized that their country and Egypt got their independence at the same time. In fact, independence, like a departing foreigner, had become a reality in their country months before Egypt got its independence. Nevertheless, there is not a single paved road in Sudan, not a single worthwhile production project, no development in agriculture and no industry. There is only one cardboard factory in the east that does not produce; there are fruit canning factories in the south and the north that do not yield anything; and there is a dairy plant in the west whose failure was proven even before its doors were opened for business.

For almost 20 years the product of all the years of independence, ever since Sudan's flag has been flying, has been two sugar refineries with a limited production capacity. When signs of hope did appear that something worthwhile might be accomplished, people trying to outdo each other found their way into the picture and killed the hope. A foreign country proposed a road-building plan. The project floundered for 7 long years when some people portrayed it as a base on which foreign airplanes would land. The weak became resigned to that suspect view of

the project, and the project was never implemented. Some of it was completed, but most of it was not. Equipment which had been assembled for construction of the project has rusted.

Between those who were trying to outdo each other and the weak, a rare opportunity in the areas of communication with which Sudan could have outpaced others was lost.

A project to build a ground satellite station vanished into thin air under the onus of oneupmanship. The project was dropped in shame over the weakness of governments. Some people portrayed that satellite station as a seat for espionage. Others saw it as an intolerable luxury. And people lost years in a country where what is most vital is everything that can make transportation and communications easier.

The People Were the Government.

People have become fed up with oppression which masquerades as misguided liberalism. They are fed up with the falsehood which hides itself in the garb of democracy. People know this game and they watch it with disinterest. Votes can be bought with money, with deception, and, what is more serious than that, votes can be bought by playing to racist, tribal, sectarian and regional tendencies. It were as though the elections season were the season for people declaring war against each other.

When governments supervise elections, their first and foremost objective is to stay in office.

When political parties run for office in an election, they see in that election nothing more than a means to an end. Election seasons thus provided the setting for a variety of scenes between those who were trying to hold on to their offices and those who were waiting to take their place.

There are villages where lumber, pipes and a very small amount of construction materials would be sent as indubitable evidence that the government was about to begin digging wells and building schools and hospitals. At first the government would not set a date, and it would also not guarantee that the project will be completed. An election was just around the corner, and after that election there would be parties lying in wait for their village. This is because these parties were biased in favor of other villages and other areas which claimed to be more deserving of the wells, the schools and the hospitals. Ultimately, this is a matter that the people will decide, and their appointed time at the polls will soon come.

What hurts people is the fact that the promises that are made are false. The consequences of these false promises are also grave.

They show what people are rightfully entitled to as though it were a grant. This is a flagrant threat to people's most pressing needs, and it stirs up people against each other. One village would take something, and another village would be getting ready to attack it. One area would receive something that was promised to it, and another area would be threatened with loss of what was given to it.

People have come to know from experience that this ridiculous scene is a total travesty. Days go by; elections are held; results are announced; a government stays in office or another comes into office; and the lumber, pipes and small amount of construction materials remain where they are. Nothing has been added to them. Rather, the passage of time and neglect have taken their toll, and what is left remains evidence of the fact that deception produces nothing but deception. If the government with its resources can deceive, then the opposition without these resources can make promises. It can even promise to build a bridge spanning the sea from Port Sudan to Jeddah. After that would giving examples serve any useful purpose?

People were the government.

People were the government because they got fed up with daily disagreements, hourly coalitions and the excesses of every greedy person. The only thing going on that they could see was the clash of slogans.

People were the government because they rebelled against the bitter reality of their country: a country connected to Africa and the Arab world; a country unique in the diversity of its cultures; a country distinguished by the fact that it is the largest and the most capable of making an effective contribution to issues of the continent, in the Arab world and on the international scene. But because it was immobilized by domestic struggles, the world decided to call Sudan the sick man of Africa.

Although this is what people knew about their lives, how easy it would be to eradicate the ailment!

It would be enough if the sound of unity were to drown out the sound of division. It would be enough if the sound of wisdom were to drown out the sounds made by those vying with each other. That would be enough to start building immediately.

This was a reason for hope: the day of the march was the anniversary of the birth of the true religion. But as we approached the road, we found out that we were as far away as we could be from it.

A scientific analysis of our society had come to the conclusion that we have been from the very beginning like a petty bourgeoisie that was hesitant and incapable of defining its class affiliation. By its very nature this bourgeoisie was one whose ideas and course were opportunist.

The scientific analysis was struck by the fact that from the very beginning our presence was based on the fact that what we had done was skip stages [of development], or according to the current jargon, we burned the stages [of development]. We took the revolutionary experience by surprise before it had become ripe, and we felt compelled (as agents) to push the course of the real revolution backwards, or we rushed (like unwitting accomplices) to challenge the inevitable change of history. Whether we were agents or unwitting accomplices, we became an actual fact that had to be dealt with to achieve objectives and alternative objectives (tactics) that were changing in the context of a constant strategy.

The strategy, of course, was one of seizing power, and the tactics were multifaceted. There were in our midst those persons who were known to them, but we did

not know that they were intellectually, ideologically and organizationally associated with them. Those people are, of course, committed to the strategy. And they are also charged with one or another aspect of the tactics.

Containment attempts were begun, and they failed. These attempts ended in failure. However, parallel to the containment attempt a malicious plan was being implemented. Its aim was to make us the target of a clash with conventional forces. This would be a clash whose inevitable consequences, according to the scientific analysis, would be to exhaust the conventional forces and exhaust us. The matter would then end with the scene being cleared of all the forces that can interfere with their plan to seize power. We would thus have played a role that was always reserved for the useful idiot. We would be the ones making the effort and paying the price, and they would be the ones getting the prize.

Thus, with the efforts and sacrifices of others--sacrifices that may even become the ultimate sacrifice--the scene would be cleared for them of everyone who may challenge their truly and extremely limited clout. In this case it would be down with intellectual inflexibility, down with those who memorize texts, down with sycophantic leftists and down with everything they have been saying about the need for the revolutionary experience to mature. What they have been saying about not skipping stages [of development] and about being very patient with the normal and slow development of society will be discounted. They have been saying that we have to be patient until society reaches its objective and the classes take shape. They have been saying that we have to be patient with the class struggle and the inevitability of the proletariat's victory which may or may not come about for local, regional and international reasons. The victory of the proletariat may or may not come about because of unknown grudges, the unlimited ability of the exploiting classes to exploit others and an inherited passivity on the part of the oppressed class. In addition, the growth of a class will not come about in the required manner. The economy is not capable, in the foreseeable future, of supporting a large industrial base. It is rather prepared subjectively for agriculture. Therefore, people will face feudalism and not capitalism. The larger foundation will not be one of workers, but rather of farmers. They are the ones who are known in the heritage as having a revolutionary sense that is less than that which is required. They are also the (Kulaks) who tried to impede the course of the parent revolution which crushed them and caused the death of thousands of them.

It was on this road that they made their move ever since we made ours on the eve of the anniversary of the birth of the True Religion. They made their move in the context of a plan that was rather intelligent.

They prodded traditional leaders to rebel under the slogan of regaining a liberal democracy which they thought allowed them the freedom to breathe and provided them with a measure of action that was consistent with their proportions which they admit were limited.

Then they made their move through their people who had been foisted on us. They overstated the danger of traditional leaders and then provoked those leaders and pushed them into a clash.

At a time when their publications were attacking the new regime, their analyses

were predicting the downfall of the regime and their sarcastic appeals were calling upon people to attack the regime, their red flags were leading our processions, and their well-known hollow slogans and expressions were being attributed to us. It appeared as though we were the ones who wanted them in power and they were the ones who were reluctant. It appeared as though we were the ones outperforming them and they were the ones holding their ground. It appeared as though we were rushing to follow the road they were following, and they were the ones who would think that such a move was not timely and that it was reckless and irresponsible.

Therefore, traditional leaders soon believed that they could form an alliance with them or even get them to be neutral. Traditional leaders thought they could settle their accounts with us before the danger became graver and our objectives turned into actual fact stripping them of their influence once and for all. That was how the precipitous attack from traditional leaders came about; they attacked and we defended ourselves.

When matters became settled for us despite the attack, that group's slogan was magnified. So here we are: we've achieved their objectives for them, and the scene has been cleared of an implacable adversary.

This is what they planned, and this is how they carried out their plan. This was how the treachery was planned and considered. Valuable time was lost in warding off conspiracies and maneuvers, amassing all the forces, warding off their attacks, and eliminating the strangers and traitors in our midst. Valuable time was lost, and we had not taken a single step toward the realization of our goals, except for our declared determination to deal with the question of the south on the basis of new principles. Other than that, the people were ahead of us.

We made them promises, and they built schools, hospitals and facilities. The contributions they made did not come from a surplus that was left after their needs were met. The contributions they made were beyond their means and their capabilities. After that they expected us to take steps commensurate with theirs, but we were experiencing the hardships of starting out, and we were still at the beginning of the road.

On the other hand our coalition was governed by an agreement reached before the march on the eve of the anniversary of the birth of the True Religion: what was not agreed to unanimously would be resolved by a vote of the majority.

Coalition leaders were the ones who conducted meetings; they did not formulate the coalition's decisions. A leader had only one vote. Theoretically, the leader's vote would be the deciding vote if there was a tie between the supporters and opponents of any decision. In practical terms, however, this was not workable. The coalition had nine leaders, and in case of a sharp division, it was impossible to come up with anything but five votes on one side and four votes on the other. No human being in our midst accepts division.

It was the majority that made decisions; the minority yielded to the majority even if the leaders had voted with the minority. That was acceptable and satisfactory during the first weeks when the coalition's functions were not executive, but rather planning functions. It would be the Council of Ministers that would implement the plans. After that, however, matters deteriorated significantly.

Those who joined us but whose loyalties and thoughts were pledged to others would occasionally succeed in attracting the opinion of the majority to their side. Their success was not due to their sound reasoning, but it was rather due to the influence of a plan that was being pursued abroad. That plan was to have its effect inside the country where we were assembled.

There were those who transmitted abroad details of what was going to be presented to our coalition. Extremist decisions would always be made regarding these details, and these decisions would be adopted by those who had been foisted on us. To ensure that these ideas were passed, they had to attract a majority, not through dialogue and discussion, but rather by means of a well-considered plan.

This plan would begin with communities and organizations abroad proclaiming slogans that would be consistent with the required resolution.

This plan would begin with processions and demonstrations that would be foisted on people. Their carefully orchestrated voices would be raised, and it would appear as though these processions and demonstrations were an expression of what people thought ought to be done and the decision that ought to be made.

Naturally, that had an effect on the majority in our coalition. Although this phenomenon recurred, attention to it has come rather late. It was that attention that brought about the departure of those who had been foisted on us and had joined our coalition.

That stage overlapped another in which we were partners in the executive authority. That stage followed an announcement that what we did would not have been done had it not been for a group that has its own ideas, beliefs and feuds as well. If you recall, that statement was made in an East European capital.

At that stage in which we had shared in the executive authority, there was no place for collective decisions that had to do with implementation. The majority made the decisions. However, implementation of those decisions was the responsibility of those who undertook the task of implementation. Because it is the method of implementation that determines the objective, each one of us found himself under considerable pressure from the same group, and the same plan was followed.

Personal relations were used, and pressure from special and professional groups was used. Loud voices in processions and marches were also used. Actually, everyone was influenced by this well-considered method of applying pressure, even though the degree of pressure that was applied varied. All this was justified by the nature of the circumstances under which our coalition was formed. We had a collective leadership, which is a limited leadership that can easily be influenced by a variety of means to polarize the majority. There was no authoritative body to follow up on implementation, and decisions were not subject to review by any authoritative body.

That was until the day of treachery, the day of victory. It was on that day that I took a stand.

My point of view differed from that of people around me. It were as though these

hours, from Monday afternoon to Thursday afternoon, were the decisive hours that drew a line between what I used to think and the new convictions [I acquired].

Before Monday and before the tide of conspiracy hit the shores of treachery I thought that people's convictions would be enough to motivate any leader to assume the responsibility of command. But those people's ambitions, which constitute the public's convictions, became an actual fact. Thursday, however, proved to be the dawn of a new day.

Without leadership the masses, which had taken the initiative to regain their leaders, had established new convictions in my heart. But that was not enough for the realization of ambitions, no matter how noble they were. Even if all people were convinced that these were noble ambitions, that was not enough to achieve them. Goals would be achieved, no matter how difficult they were, with the participation of all people. What we had before the treachery were ambitions about which there was unanimous agreement. We had goals that people believed in and objectives they often aspired to. People's support at the outset then was the result of the identity of goals. But what are the means that would be required for the achievement of those goals?

Are those means manifested in a vanguard that would give expression to people's aspirations? Would this vanguard be the alternative that would make it unnecessary for people to participate in the decision-making process? What would this vanguard carry out, and what would it follow up on? If this were true, what happened would not have happened. Members of the vanguard disagreed because they had different loyalties. They sought nobody else's decisions: only their own.

Some of them turned to consensus decisions. Others broke with consensus decisions and chose to conspire to achieve what they wanted. If the people had been in their midst, consensus decisions would have been a safety device against treachery and conspiracy.

When treachery was defeated, who was it that brought about its defeat? Was it the vanguard who were stunned by the treachery and then fell under its control? Or was it the people without leaders who redeemed their vanguard?

It was believed that day, perhaps along the castle walls, and perhaps in the people's excitement, that a popular consensus was the only means available. It was believed that it was the only way to go and the only choice that was available.

Some of the people around me thought that what happened constituted a voluntary action by the people empowering me to retain exclusive and total power so as to lead them in their efforts to achieve their goals. But I was convinced that what had happened was an affirmation that power, all power, belonged to the people. Power belonged to the people when they seized it from the oppressors. I was convinced that I was merely the symbol they wanted to use as the manifestation of that will.

Some of the people around me thought that what happened, regardless of its consequences, meant that despite the concentration of power, caution was being observed until the danger exploded. They thought that with the new conditions, broader dangers would reappear.

One of those scenes of danger was an international one. An international entity became openly hostile to Sudan because there were people in Sudan who from the first moment had ruined a pledge of bloodshed that entity had wanted. But the people of Sudan suddenly reneged on their pledge, raising the white banner of peace instead of the red banner of bloodshed to spread their influence in an area where Sudan is the center.

I would say, "The more reason why power should belong to the people. He who cannot provide his own personal security, no matter how much his power, cannot provide that security for his people. But if people are motivated by their loyalty to their leaders to achieve victory, then those same people will take action to achieve victory for themselves out of a sense of loyalty."

The people around me thought that a period of time had to elapse between what happened and any subsequent steps to call upon people to participate.

But my answer was unequivocal and final. People were to be called upon to participate now and immediately. I was asked about the matter of holding a popular referendum on the leaders since regardless of the outcome of such a referendum, it will be less than what happened. Even a resounding positive consensus will fall short of that which had defied oppression and sacrificed lives and blood to regain its leaders.

My reaction to that reasoning was one that it deserved. The sacrifices people made made it necessary that we check with them so they can confirm their actions by words, and even in other conditions, confirm their words by actions. And who is it who can make decisions for people and on their behalf, even if his evidence for those decisions was their heroism? Isn't there a possibility, albeit very slight, that even the least initiative on the people's part was a rejection of the traitors more than it was an insistence on those who had been captured by them?

Aren't people entitled to an opportunity to choose? Am I not entitled to an opportunity to choose? Aren't we entitled to an opportunity to achieve certainty?

The referendum was about taking over the people's affairs, but immediately before that, there was another crisis.

A few people with ulterior motives told fellow citizens, "If a referendum has to be held, it should not be one on him [i.e., Numayri] alone. One of you should be on the ballott with him so that that person would get with that consensus the same legitimacy and the same powers that Numayri has. This will guarantee that you will not lose influence after you help him get power and he decides he would not have to consult you or accept your ideas."

These people were loyal fellow-citizens, and they rejected that notion. They told me what they had been told. That was an opportunity to indicate the landmarks of the new road before it was too late.

It was my opinion that the future would not be like the past. Consulting with the people does not mean that an individual or a group of individuals would have exclusive power. If the people's vote were an affirmative one, that vote would be a

vote for the power of institutions, which is a step toward power for all the people. And this is a stage that, I think, is not too far away in the future. The person people will agree about will not be an individual as much as he will be a symbol. The person who is elected will symbolize the unity and the will of the people: a unity and a will that would be confirmed by constitutional, political and other executive institutions. The future will not be and cannot be like the past!

Disagreement has no place in the context of institutions. Differences among institutions have no place unless these institutions are in a stage of decline. There are to be no unilateral decisions and no unilateral opinions regardless of the position and historical role of the person who comes out with those opinions.

They were as understanding and as accepting as they were loyal.

The experience, however, soon undermined certainty. The people voted, and through that vote institutions were set up. A new Council of Ministers was formed, and a Constituent People's Assembly was elected. Its first task was to draft a permanent constitution for the country. A steering committee was formed to draw up a view of a comprehensive political system. The wheels began turning, and those fellow citizens began overplaying their hands.

I cautioned and I examined the situation critically.

I warned and I threatened.

I cited past events as examples to teach people how things ought to be. They had all held positions along with others, since everyone's work was subject to the rule of law so as to preclude intervention and conflict.

Early one morning before dawn when people were still asleep, one of them came to my door. I was surprised that he had come to my house; I was stunned by what he had to say; and then I became angry because of what he was asking.

He started talking about everyone's responsibility, and particularly the responsibility of those who went through the labor pains of the beginning. He spoke at length about principles and objectives, and he spoke in detail about the vast world we live in. He said that evil and virtue were confused together in this contemporary world of ours which he said was governed by a world-wide intelligence network with agents in all countries and in all positions. He said those agents even held positions of major responsibility. Because I did not understand what he was getting at, I asked him what he meant. He hesitated, and then he mentioned the names of two ministers who were his colleagues. He affirmed that he had confirmed information that they were agents for that widely known world-wide intelligence network. Then he asked me to relieve them both of their responsibilities.

He had no evidence for the accusation he was making other than what he had heard. God only knows from whom he had heard all this and what were the objectives and motives of those who related all that to him!

What he was asking went beyond the agreement we had before people voted. It was

also a violation of what all the people had agreed to when they determined that officials would be accountable to them. That was a return to how things were prior to the treachery, when authorities corresponded to each other and jurisdictions overlapped.

I told him all of that, and I purposefully asked him to determine his position on the request he had made after having heard what I said. When he insisted on his demand, there was nothing else to do but relieve him of his responsibility.

Was that the only thing to do?

Yes, it was the only thing to do despite the fact that there were many options. He could have been persuaded that what he heard was not true. His request could have been ignored; it could have been negotiated and delayed. The assistance of people close to that man could have been sought. His request could have been turned down, and he could have been allowed to stay in his position. But that was not possible because I was concerned about establishing a principle. The precedent was a dangerous one, considering it was a return to a method whose existence was justified by circumstances. But these circumstances ceased to exist under the legitimacy of the government that was formed by a consensus of the people. What happened meant that he was becoming involved with new circles of people who were out to achieve their objectives or vent their resentment in that manner. What happened meant foiling all institutions by divesting them of their follow-up and examination role. Ultimately, what happened meant an awesome centralization of power in the hands of one person. He would be the one who understands, and he would be the one who makes judgments.

This was due in part to the fact that there were those in the executive branch who were not equal with others. Those people placed themselves in positions of guarding and looking over others and examining them and wielding punishment. They placed themselves in such positions on the basis of a previous role they had played and on past history.

In part, all that meant acknowledging dual authority and graduated responsibility at one level. Despite equal responsibilities, authorities and powers there are those who are historically in a higher grade, and there are those who are in a lower grade. Therefore, the decision was made to relieve him of his responsibilities.

When some of his fellow-citizens and mine joined him in solidarity, I realized then that I had made the proper decision.

Years went by before they came back. But they did come back after having learned from the experience that a historical role was greater than all positions. They learned that having a historical role was an honor, not a privilege.

Steps were taken in succession after the treachery and after the people attained power.

How do people's rights turn from slogans to material fact? How does their activism take shape within institutions? This is a step on the road to another objective where people would be the institutions.

How do we make people think along the same lines? Would calling for unity and promoting it be enough to achieve it?

How are people to protect their unity? How are they to protect their gains? How are people to express their interests? How are they to impose their will? How can people watch over others with regard to their goals?

The constitution was essential as a document that is binding on the ruler and on subjects.

The constitution was supposed to determine the authorities and relationships between the ruler and the subjects; it was supposed to determine the responsibilities of the state, the rights of people and the identity of the social and economic system. The constitution was to determine who has the authority to legislate and enact laws and who will be charged with implementing the laws as well as the hierarchy and boundaries of the executive authority. The constitution was to determine political responsibility and its implications as well as oversight authorities. The constitution covered all that.

I asked for one provision, and I requested that that provision be put to a referendum subject to the constitution.

I asked that government in Sudan be decentralized.

Some people were stunned, and many objections were made by officials and by friends. They were made by some writers, and they came in some personal letters. Those who were objecting to the decentralization of government said they were washing their hands of that notion in front of God and history.

The objections addressed the nature of the stage the country was going through where divisive factors outnumbered cohesive factors. There were narrow regional affiliations, limited ethnic affiliations and economic interests that set up more ties with some neighboring areas outside the borders than with other areas inside the country. Under such conditions [it was argued that] further centralization of government through centralized development and through administrative decisions made by the central government would link the various regions with the central government and eventually bring them in line.

But I saw matters from the opposite perspective. Centralized control over a large area like Sudan was the reason for the fragmentation we were experiencing and not its result. Without ignoring the role of sectarianism and partisanship, the fact that the central government monopolized power meant that within its capabilities the central government was unable to exercise its authority except in a very small circle. That circle began and ended in the capital. When I talk about exercising power, I am referring to something other than imposing and collecting taxes. I am talking about exercising power in the sense of assuming the responsibilities of providing services to people, all people, and in various areas, whether these are close to the capital or not. Under Sudan's conditions of large spaces, difficult communications and a dearth of resources, it would be impossible for a centralized government to play a positive role. The centralized government is far away from where people live: it cannot find out about their problems, and it cannot settle their disputes. Because it is far away from the

people, it cannot detect their resources and capabilities, and it cannot make plans to put these resources to profitable use. Naturally, a central government would not be able to develop and to modernize.

Government decentralization does not mean that the provinces will have no power. It rather means that government agencies would be set up in the provinces from the provinces. These agencies will then be better able to find out what the problems are, and they will be more able to plan for and implement solutions. They will be more able to discover resources and more able to put them to good use. They will be more able to stay close to what is going on, to motivate actually existing abilities and energies and to put them to good use in modernization and development efforts.

[It was argued that] a centralized government in a country like Sudan would mean that the presence of a sovereign power will be superficial. Meanwhile, real power would be concentrated in unofficial institutions created by the local environment according to subjective standards, including the power of money, a person's descent or ethnicity or sectarian influence.

Achieving cohesion and emphasizing a sense of belonging and loyalty to a single homeland will not be achieved through slogans, propaganda or exhortation. It will be achieved by modernizing and developing all areas, especially the backward ones. This requires above all else that a greater measure of flexibility be achieved to meet the needs of modernization and development.

To those who object I would say that the decentralization of government does not mean the absence of a national presence in the provinces. Government decentralization rather means a national bond between all the provinces. This bond would be created by stimulating the provinces' capabilities to assume responsibilities for establishing themselves.

Then the draft constitution would be put to a popular referendum, and the first constitution in the history of Sudan would be ratified. One of its provisions is that Sudan is to have a decentralized government.

Executive and constitutional institutions were established in accordance with the constitution. Under the constitution all the laws were amended to make them compatible with the provisions of the constitution. Sudan embarked upon the stage of building a modern state.

But what happens after the constitution is ratified? In fact, who is to protect the constitution? This is the people's responsibility. They are the ones who formulated it; they are the ones who ratified it; and they are the ones who committed themselves to it. But how are the people going to exercise that responsibility? How are they going to organize their ranks not only to protect the constitution, but also to protect the entire mission and take part in the decision making process?

The choices that were available for organizing people were numerous. However, choosing one of the various alternatives was linked with Sudan's conditions, its distinguished location and then its historical development at this stage.

The option of having multiple parties had been rejected even before it was proposed as an option. This was an experience that had failed twice in less than 2 decades of having a national government. There was no need for a third failure.

Also parties, in the scientific sense of the term, constituted an expression of the economic and social aspirations of a class of people confronting other classes. Sudan is going through a period in which classes are loosely defined, with people's incomes overlapping. This is due, on the one hand, to social equality and, [on the other hand], to the absence of agricultural feudalism and industrial or commercial capitalism, each of which has its dangers.

The means of production, most importantly land, are not publicly owned. They are collectively owned. Land belongs to those who farm it. This is a realistic formulation in Sudan. In fact, the state is calling upon people, urging them and encouraging them to acquire land by farming it.

Even planned, irrigated projects cannot be classified as privately owned or publicly owned. There is no ownership of land; people farm the land, and they do so in the context of fair relations of production.

So far owning livestock is something that is more worthwhile socially than economically. Ownership of livestock is a sign of prestige more than it is a sign of wealth. Livestock is primarily used, especially in the south, to pay dowries.

Otherwise, major production projects are publicly owned, and all service facilities are supervised by the state.

The intermediary sector is the transportation sector, and the state owns its most important facilities: the railroads, maritime shipping, river and air transportation. Thus, there is no economic or social need to warrant the existence of parties that would represent the interests of classes of people in the scientific sense of a political party's function and role.

This was not the only reason, however, why political parties were rejected. The most important reason for that was the fact that the history of political parties in Sudan has always manifested sectarian hopes for tightening sectarian control over people and taking them back to the Middle Ages where temporal power would join religious power under the principle of divine representation. Except for right-wing and left-wing ideological parties all the parties were either political fronts for religious sects or groups that had temporarily broken with those sects and would always be yearning to rejoin them. This is because these parties have no rules except those that are allowed by the sect in whose name they are allowed to speak.

In the absence of an intellectual mode and a well-considered program and with the total reliance on sectarianism and involvement on its behalf in feuds and alliances, parties harbored regional and ethnic tendencies. These tendencies were due to their political activities in those areas where they had influence. The political front through which these sects operated enabled them to build the foundations for their separatist tendencies. In fact, it enabled them to promote these tendencies and strive to achieve them. All these are factors that made rejecting multiple parties as an organizational framework necessary. Consequently, the formula of a front was not being considered because a front is an

interim coalition of a group of parties whose goals are strategically different, but whose interests are tactically identical. But these parties are doomed to go their separate ways.

What is the possible alternative?

And here we had to pause and reflect upon what was happening in the region. That was early in the seventies, after 'Abd-al-Nasir's death and before it. The disastrous June defeat had cast its gloomy shadows on the Nasirist experiment and all its symbols. Among these symbols were the alliance of the working people's forces, having one political organization and the name, the Socialist Union.

I recall that it was in that period in particular that when the defeat and the reasons for it were analyzed, the conclusion that was always reached was that the political system invented by 'Abd-al-Nasir had to be changed. The tendencies that appeared in [political] thought and literature condemned the political experiment with all its symbols; they condemned in particular the alliance formula and the Socialist Union. The alliance and the organization were sources of grief; no tears were to be shed for them. Nevertheless, the option that was presented to people was that of an alliance of forces and that of having one organization which we also chose to call the Socialist Union.

Efforts were stepped up.

It was an attempt to revive what had died.

It was an inability to recognize the truth which was as plain as the sunshine. If not that, what would be the significance of repeating that whose failure was established and acknowledged?

It was a set plan to impose unity with Egypt on Sudan against the will of the people of Sudan. The first step to that end was to standardize the political organization even if that organization had failed in Egypt and was doomed to fail here.

What is intended by the alliance formula, and who are the parties to such an alliance? What is intended by the alliance formula, particularly under Sudan's conditions where people are backward, very backward? Let it be called the alliance of the forces of backwardness.

How can the proper magnitude of each one of the parties to the alliance be measured when all these parties differ in size, number, influence and effectiveness? Intellectuals constitute a crust whose clout cannot compare with that of farmers. Workers have an awareness that farmers do not have. Soldiers are in their barracks and not where political actions take place. If the proper magnitude of each one of these parties cannot be measured, then one can forget about regulation and assessment of these parties!

I heard all this and waited for a long, long time for the opposition to come up with an alternative. But they never did. It was normal, however, for such objections to emerge. But it was impossible that there be a dialogue around them because different matters were being considered.

The proposed political organization and the alliance formula that was pending were the product of a careful balance between the conditions of the stage and the needs of subsequent stages. The alliance formula between social forces, which are the forces of labor and production, was the possible alternative for any arrangement that would go beyond that formula. This is because in that case, it would be possible, in fact, it would be inevitable for this formula to be one for friction and even for a clash and a feud.

What was being proposed as an alternative to the alliance of the forces of labor was any coalition in which people would agree on those values that have been the legacy of existing sectarian, partisan, ethnic, racial and regional affiliations.

The alliance of the forces of labor was an agreement on the goal of working for a common objective, that of building. This alliance was not an action by workers for the sake of workers; it was not an action by farmers for the sake of farmers; it was not an action by capitalists to increase their profits; it was not an action by intellectuals to further consolidate their detachment from the rest of the forces of production by withdrawing into a shell or by practicing snobbery; nor was it an action by soldiers that they did as professional soldiers, satisfied with their strength and detached from what was going on around them.

The formula for the alliance was that of a coalition of workers, all workers, regardless of their previous ethnic or regional affiliations, inherited or otherwise acquired. It was also a formula for farmers, intellectuals and national capitalists. Soldiers were the only group that were assimilated in the coalition because [the military] is a national institution affiliation with which is second to none, with the exception of the higher and more universal affiliation with Sudan along with absolute loyalty to it and sacrificing oneself and one's life for its unity and integrity. The proposed formula was one in which all would interact through a common value: that of work and production. All forces would interact with each other in the context of a common objective, which is to build, reconstruct and achieve national unity.

Thus, any sense of affiliation with any group within the alliance formula would be ruled out, and any conflict in the context of this alliance formula would be aborted unless it were to emerge in the form of legitimate competition within the context of the alliance.

Thus, everyone's roles would be integrated in the context of an integral whole to achieve a universal objective: that of building the homeland and reshaping life in it so as to achieve abundance and justice.

So much for the formula.

But what about the name?

Naturally, that was not copied. Human heritage is not the exclusive domain of anyone. The name was consistent with our circumstances, and we were the ones who chose it. We chose a union because we were setting up a national union. We chose a socialist union because socialism is our national identity, which is based on the realization of social justice through labor, production and abundance: the three precursors to justice, in fact the three cornerstones of justice.

The years went by--about 10 full years--and conditions in the region changed. What we adopted then still stands, deriving its strength from its ability to achieve its objectives.

The dream of a union between Egypt, Sudan and Libya faded, and then the dream of a union that also included Syria after it joined the Tripoli alliance faded too. Nevertheless, the Sudanese Socialist Union continued to exist.

The alliance formula failed in Egypt and the Socialist Union there vanished from political life and was replaced by multiple parties. Those who had placed their bets on the failure of the Sudan branch of the Socialist Union lost their bets. Nevertheless, the Sudanese Socialist Union continued to stand tall for one reason: it was never a branch of the Socialist Union in Egypt. The alliance formula and the Socialist Union organization fell in Libya, and they were replaced by new formulas: the people's congresses and the General People's Congress.

But the Sudanese Socialist Union continued to exist and to be effective.

The people thus proved the authenticity of their choice. When the Constituent Congress of the Socialist Union approved the formula and the name as well as the organization and its bylaws, it was assuming its role. Conferences were held on all levels; the meetings of the central committee continued; and the national congress met in regular sessions. The Sudanese Socialist Union made decisions and the state adhered to them. These decisions affected local and national development plans as well as the historic transition to provincial government.

Perhaps one of the most powerful aspects of this leading organization is the fact that self-criticism is practised within it. This criticism from within exceeds that which is directed at the organization from outside. This is perhaps the first time in history that an organization has been subjected to bitter criticism from its top leaders without reeling and faltering. This organization continues on its course to achieve its objectives by criticizing itself and by correcting its course. The organization's objectives are those of building the Sudanese nation and achieving sufficiency, abundance and prosperity under justice.

And what is to follow this step? Indeed, what is to accompany this step? The south has been mortally wounded. The tragedy of the mid-fifties continued to claim the lives of men, and it continued to bring about bloodshed and destruction and to drain money and resources.

What about the struggle that did not move the world's conscience but rather provoked its resentment? Everyone tried to take advantage of that struggle and to make it serve his interests. The godless tried to take advantage of the tragedy in the name of revolution, and the religious tried to take advantage of the tragedy in the name of Christianity. Some people tried to surround the south to complete the siege around the distant north. This was used by some people as an example of Africa's inability to assume the burdens of its independence. Some took that as evidence indicating that people on the continent cannot exist in united entities because they are, of course by nature, feuding tribes, that accept peace only when it is imposed on them by a conquering foreigner.

The East spoke of justice; the West spoke of freedom; and the Arabs spoke of nationalism. They all ignored this nation, Sudan, which continued to bleed for years.

The south....

May there be peace for the south, with the south and in the south! The south is the beacon of hope that led our ranks when we took action on the eve of the anniversary of the birth of the True Religion. In fact, the south defended our action before we took action, and it defended our coalition before the plan.

Who among us has not experienced the tragedy in the south?

We've experienced this tragedy, and I've experienced the pain. We've experienced the pain of lifeless villages and cities that used to throb with life. We've experienced the pain of bloodshed, a pain so overpowering one does not know how to begin mourning for it.

The defender and the invader are brothers. The murderer and the victim are brothers. This is the pain of conflict between place and man; vegetation and bloodshed; flowers and murder; water and drought. There is a lack of compassion that almost amounts to hatred, and there is a harshness that almost amounts to cruelty. People are living a harsh life without compassion, wandering aimlessly without shelter, traveling without direction and staying without water or food.

There is the pain of horrifying scenes.

There were schools without pupils; churches where no prayer services are held; fields with no farmers; and homes where there is no warmth.

There were orphans without fathers: and there are so many orphans in the south and in the north.

How cruel is the pain of recurrent history! When the great Mahdi fought the oppressor, chased colonialists, and enflamed the great national revolution of Sudan, he was supported by Bahr al-Ghazal, which declared its loyalty to him. The Dinka and al-Nuwayr expelled Lupton, the commander of the garrison, and received the Mahdi's commander, Karam Allah Shaykh Muhammad Karkasawi, who raised the banner of the Mahdi's revolution over the planes of Bahr al-Ghazal as a symbol of Sudan's unity.

Al-Mahdi's camels advanced to the province of Equatoria; the tribes of the province led the way and tightened the siege around the falling and surrendering garrisons. Dr Amin, the governor of the province retreated and 'Umar Salih, the Mahdi's emissary raised the flag of national unity on the province of Equatoria.

How can history repeat itself in less than 100 years? How can a united land turn into a scene of conflict?

The bloodshed among our people in the south must stop. Our blood ties must be re-established; our unity must not be broken; and our united effort must be directed toward building the country.

The declaration of 9 June was a banner for peace and unity, but the events that followed 9 June were gloomy. We did not light lanterns around our banner so that our fellows could see it, nor were our fellow citizens able to see it either in the rush of events around us.

But now the effort and the time to light the lanterns are available. The banner and its features have become visible and clear. We met and the glorious Addis Ababa Agreement was the result of that meeting.

When the Ministry of Information issued a statement announcing that an agreement had been signed, it concluded that statement with a very significant sentence.

This is an agreement for peace and unity. With this agreement the minor effort, which is the effort that was made to achieve the agreement, came to an end. The major effort, which is the effort to preserve the agreement, was to come after that. And so it did.

In the Arab world fires broke out and writers vied with each other attacking the agreement.

They talked about the Arab character of Sudan which was buried alive in the jungles of the south, and they talked about Sudan's preoccupation with itself and its isolation from the Arab nation, which was a condition for getting rid of international colonialism to bring the struggle in the south to an end.

They talked about a new alliance that would include Khartoum, Addis Ababa and perhaps Salisbury. It may even include..., God forbid!

They talked about the demise of Arab culture in Sudan and about Sudan's historic role as a bridge and a crossroads between the Arab world and Africa.

Because they do not know Sudan, they abused it and abused its role. They even abused the deep relations between the African continent and the Arab nation.

Sudan is not a piece of land divided by the ethnic affiliations of its population. Sudan is rather a large country in which different ethnic groups and cultures merge and overlap. It may be that those who don't know this fact about Sudan do not know that the Dinka tribes have Arab blood and that Arabic is the common denominator and the language of communications and conversation among various tribes in the south. Each one of these tribes has its own local language that is spoken only by tribe members. Furthermore, these people unwittingly follow the colonialist classification of the population in the African continent, north and south of the Sahara. They are even modest in their evaluation of ties between the Arab world and Africa by regarding these ties that go through Sudan to be the bridge between the Arab world and Africa. In fact, Arab-African ties are cultural, ethnic, economic and social ties. Sudan is the country in which various cultures interact, and it is also the country through which Arab culture interacts with African culture. Moreover, the greater part of the Arab world is located on the African continent, and the larger number of Arabs are Africans. And God is our witness for that.

The people of Egypt are African Arabs, and the people of Sudan are African Arabs.

And where do the people of Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Mauritania, Somalia and Djibouti live?

How did colonialism portray the scenes of destruction and sorrow in south Sudan?

Wasn't the image presented in newspapers, in the media and in colonialism's political circles, secret dens and suspect institutions one of a struggle between Arabs and Africans? Wasn't it presented as a struggle between Islam and Christianity?

Wasn't the continued struggle in south Sudan tantamount to aborting Arab-African solidarity?

With the division and the feuding with which it has been plagued, was Sudan able to play its role in the African continent as an Arab country that was part of the African continent and affiliated with it?

Would I have been able to do what I did at the Addis Ababa African Summit and then in my travels throughout the continent despite the destruction and bloodshed in the south of my country? Would I have been able to accomplish what has been accomplished of having most African countries break relations with Israel before the glorious Ramadan War?

I was always aware of the fact that Sudan's issues were the issues of the Sudanese people only. No one was to intervene and interfere in those issues regardless of his justifications and good intentions.

I realized, and I still do, that I can only be an African in an Arab nation and an Arab on the African continent. This is my destiny. In fact, this is Sudan's role. Therefore, I resisted having Sudan become an instrument or a seat for any center that could arouse suspicions between Arabs and Africans. I resisted that to the point of causing a confrontation. There is a long history of colonialist intrigue that hardened people's hearts, created hard feelings and colored Arab-African relations with suspicion. This may have started a disagreement between me and a fellow Arab when he thought that the road to unity with Sudan would have to go through south Sudan. He thought that he had enough money and power to enable us to overcome this problem by oppression and tyranny. I told him then that the issue of south Sudan was Sudan's issue and that the Sudanese people, and I among them, would not allow any strange party to interfere in it. If such intervention were to occur, all the Sudanese people in the south and the north would overlook any differences we had with each other. We would then oppose the intervention and resist it up to the point of going to war and fighting.

In fact, I did say then that if such intervention were to occur, events would have taken another course regardless of what was said about crushing those traitors who had cast their gloomy shadow on Khartoum and regardless of allegations of aid from abroad. The masses that opposed the traitors would have indisputably supported those traitors in the face of [foreign] intervention. In fact, if I were to shed my captive status, I would join them to oppose the foreigners. After that we would then take the time to settle matters between us.

What applies to Sudan applies to the continent and its people. Anyone who is

concerned about Arab-African solidarity will be more concerned about not involving any Arab party in any African dispute. Otherwise, we will find that generally speaking the Arab nation itself will become a party against the African continent.

It was this understanding of the balance required in relations between Arabs and Africans that was the origin of the dispute that developed in 1976 into a clash with brothers. That clash peaked with the events which Sudan experienced and the world watched.

It was just before evening when the telephone rang in my home. I received a telephone call informing me that airplanes belonging to a fraternal Arab country had penetrated Sudan's air space without obtaining prior permission. I was told that the responsible agencies, in accordance with international law, had asked these airplanes to land in Khartoum Airport. When the airplanes landed, it turned out that they were carrying weapons, equipment and a number of military men of different ranks. It turned out they were on their way to an African country located on Sudan's southeastern borders.

It was necessary here to make very careful considerations.

The country to which these airplanes, equipment, weapons and military men were headed was on the verge of becoming involved in a war with a neighboring African country.

Sudan's declared position, one that adheres to the charter of the Organization of African Unity [OAU], was one formulated in the context of its concern for its relations with the countries of the continent. Sudan was engaged in active efforts to contain the dispute between the two fraternal countries. Therefore, if Sudan were to agree to have the airplanes resume their flights, that would mean it was no longer playing the role of mediator. In fact, it would mean that Sudan had accepted the role of a party that was biased in favor of one of the parties to the dispute, particularly after the airplanes landed on Sudanese territory. In addition, the fact that airplanes carrying weapons and soldiers would take off from an Arab country, land in another Arab country and then resume their flight to an African country that was fighting with another African country would only mean that the matter had gone beyond being a mere African confrontation and that it had become an Arab-African confrontation. This is what the conscience of Sudan and its genuine affiliation with the Arab nation and the African continent cannot tolerate.

It was therefore decided that "Sudan was to play host to the passengers on the airplanes until the aircraft were prepared to resume their flight. The airplanes were then to go back where they came from."

An anti-Sudan political campaign was launched in the media. The country from which the airplanes had taken off issued a statement condemning Sudan's "Arab" position. That country declared its determination that the airplanes reach their destination even if they had to take a route that bypassed Sudan.

A fraternal country that was allied to the country from which the airplanes had taken off organized a vicious media campaign against Sudan. Writers in that country vied with each other in their condemnations of me.

One of them wrote an article entitled, "Hal Inqalab 'ala Nafsuh?" [Did Sudan Turn against Itself?]

He wrote passionately, comparing my pro-Arab positions before the Addis Ababa Agreement with my anti-Arab positions after the question of the south was resolved.

Another writer chose a provocative title for his article: 'Qabil, Madha Fa'alta bi Akhik?' [Cain, What Did You Do to Your Brother?]

That writer wrote in his distinguished fluent style about offers for favors that were met with ingratitude. Had it not been for these offers of favor, the traitors in Sudan would have been victorious, and Sudan would have become their victim.

The years went by.

And then one day I condemned the armed intervention launched by an African country against another African country. On the same day my country opened its doors to thousands of refugees among whom were those who came into the country as supporters but who left after their intervention had contributed to defeat.

When they left, they were replaced by anti-Arab sentiments. (The Arabs were deemed to be greedy). Along with these sentiments the enemy regained the position he had lost under Arab-African solidarity.

A few Arab media agencies continued their campaign against the Addis Ababa Agreement. It were as though the peace in the south were not peace for Sudan, which is part of the Arab nation.

That position was reflected in an extremely harsh manner in the Arab response to the appeal I made to the world for aid to Sudan. I appealed to the world to help Sudan receive and settle the hundreds of thousands of Sudanese who had returned to their country from neighboring African countries after the agreement was signed.

Except for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the countries of the Gulf, Arab contributions were less than what was expected when one brother helps another. The United States headed the list of Arab and international countries making contributions. Those contributions reached several million [dollars], but there was one fraternal Arab country whose contributions did not exceed a few hundred [dollars].

When I visited the city of Waw in the province of Bahr al-Ghazal in the south, I addressed the people and reviewed the efforts that had been made to rebuild life in the south and settle the citizens who were returning to their homes. To avoid any unrealistic ideas about the magnitude of the foreign aid we were receiving, I reviewed with the people the contributions we received, mentioning the figures and the name of the contributing countries. When I mentioned the figure that was paid by the United States, I applauded its contribution and I added that that contribution was made when diplomatic relations between it and Sudan were broken. Then I went on to wonder if that position on the part of the

United States did not call upon Sudan to think about restoring diplomatic relations with it.

This was a mere idea that had occurred to me in the context of considering a contribution that was larger than the contributions offered by friends and brothers to confront conditions created by a lengthy period of backwardness that has been as long as time itself. Under colonialism the south had lived under conditions that precluded modernization and communications with the north and ruled out outreach activities to that part of the country. After independence the south became captive to two restrictions: that of blood and that of neglect. Thousands of southerners emigrated to neighboring African countries, and some of them went into the jungles. To them and to all of Sudan peace meant nothing more than returning to their homes and rebuilding their new lives. That required housing, food, employment opportunities, educational facilities and health facilities.

All that was in the past when Sudan's resources depended upon unforeseen changes. Sudan's more important resources, cotton and gum Arabic, depend upon the conditions and components of production. They depend upon the availability of labor, the upheavals of the world market and the balance of supply and demand.

The agreement for peace and unity was one of the first steps taken on a lengthy road. What followed those first steps was more important and more serious: rebuilding life. This was a rebuilding effort that started under ground zero to strengthen the capabilities and energies we had. We asked the countries of the world for help, and they responded. We expected those who were close to us to give us help, but the help they gave us was less than what we expected. We expected friends to help us, and the contribution made by the United States exceeded every other contribution despite the broken relations between us.

The comparison showed the disparity. Talking about merely reconsidering the possibility of restoring our relations with the United States was justified by the size of the United States' contribution and by the fact that our relations with that country were broken.

Nevertheless, well-known writers opposed our right to think, and they attacked us unfairly. Among those was one--and may God forgive him--who wrote an article entitled, "Min Ajl Hifnah Dularat" [For a Fistful of Dollars!] mourning the dignity that was bought with money. This was the same man, may God have mercy on his soul, who years later wrote that the United States was a full partner. He wrote that the United States was the only country holding all the keys to peace.

That was the major battle.

Although bullets were the flagrant expression of doubts among brothers, the absence of gunfire did not mean that suspicions had died, particularly since blood had been shed over a period of 17 years. The absence of gunfire did not mean that suspicions had died, particularly when brothers embracing each other would not prevent a party here and a party there from seeing in what was matters that could be. I was aware of that fact, and I was apprehensive about its complications. It was therefore inescapable that I would stake my life as a barrier against all doubts, hard feelings and suspicions.

When I was notified that a few southerners who had assembled in their camp in preparation for joining the national army had refused to turn over their weapons before receiving the national army's weapons that were to be issued to them, and when I was told that their refusal to turn over those weapons was linked with something like an uprising and preparations for combat, my response was to ask that a helicopter be prepared to fly me to their camp.

I overlooked all warnings about their being armed with modern weapons and about them being suspect because they had gone beyond refusing to turn over their weapons and had rebelled. [I was told] that these people had in fact been divided into combat ready formations and that some of them may reject peace, unity and the agreement.

Nevertheless, the helicopter took off, and it flew over the camp after flying over jungles which could have sheltered those who could have destroyed it. The airplane landed. My only weapon was the confidence I had in them. None of my companions carried any weapons. The people were surprised to see me. I listened to them and I talked with them. Before I left I told them that I had issued instructions that new weapons were to be issued to them and they were to keep their old weapons.

They cheered for peace and unity as they bid me farewell.

I visited all the villages, and I went through all the jungles. There I met people who were armed and people who were not. I came face to face with their traditions and I accepted the judgment of those traditions.

The chief of a tribe observed intentions in the way a bull that had been stabbed would fall. If the bull fell to the right, then the person who stabbed him was truthful. But if the bull fell to the left, then it was up to the person who stabbed him to prove his good intentions.

I stabbed a bull, and I accepted God's judgment of my intentions. The bull teetered and fell leaning toward the left. Then he rose, teetered again and fell to the right.

People cheered loudly for peace and unity.

I traveled among the people; I drank what they drank; I ate and savored their food; I heard them talk; I spoke with them; and we consulted with each other on what ought to be done.

Under the guidance of wisdom, violence turned to peace; doubts turned to certainty; and destruction turned to construction. The people in the southern part of my country were wise.

That was the major battle.

The majority of the people accepted what had happened in the south. Some of them, however, saw the spectre of separation in the agreement for unity. Among those people there were those who condemned a unity that gave the southern province a provincial government, a provincial legislative council, provincial ministers, a

regional development plan and a regional budget. These people wondered what was left before a declaration was made that the south would split from Sudan. And the years went by.

Those same people reiterated publicly what they had been saying quietly. They made those statements in front of thousands at the national conference of our political organization.

They were not talking about the south and about its government, its legislative assembly and its separate budget.

They were rather praising [the concept of] a provincial government for all the provinces of Sudan. [This concept allowed] each province to have a provincial government, a provincial legislative assembly, provincial ministers and a separate budget.

They said, "The south was the model that led the way. We will follow the south on the same road."

Development lay on that road. The choices that were to be made on that road were difficult ones, and the road to development was arduous. We had to choose how we were to begin, and there were numerous independent opinions about that.

It was thought that we should begin with large production projects whose returns can be utilized to finance subsequent production projects gradually and eventually services. Going the opposite way would strain our resources. Yes indeed, going the opposite way would strain our resources, but can we avoid that?

A friend who is a journalist visited some of Sudan's provinces. When he returned to the capital, he asked if he could see me. He told me that he did not expect anyone outside Sudan or even in the capital to believe him if he were to report what he saw with his own eyes and what he heard with his own ears when he visited a few development projects. He said that people outside Sudan will not believe what he will report and that people in the capital could not imagine that what he saw did in fact exist in their country.

He had met a few Sudanese intellectuals in the country and abroad, and he was informed by them that the slow pace of life had remained unchanged. He was told that hardships had in fact brought the pace of life to a virtual standstill.

The journalist who is a friend added, "Your ability--inadvertent or otherwise--to impose a virtual blackout on the pace of work in your country has created a barrier between reality and what people think in their own minds outside Sudan and even in the capital." Therefore, he said that if he were to report what he saw, people who read his report would think that he had a vivid imagination or that he was dissembling. And neither assumption about what he wrote was acceptable to him.

Nevertheless, he wrote the following: "The tragedy of the regime in Sudan is that it has brought benefits to those who do not vote, but it has offered nothing to those who make a lot of noise. Thus, the regime received no thanks from the former, and the latter did not stop criticizing it."

But who are those people, and who are the others?

Those who received benefits received what they were entitled to. Time had to be speeded up so they could catch up with the age. Those people had to be introduced to clothing after having lived without it. They had to be introduced to water after living with thirst. They had to be introduced to homes after having found shelter in the mountains. They had to be introduced to a stable life after being nomads for a long period of time. They had to learn how to earn a living in a new way, a way different from that outmoded way when man spent his time gathering fruits and grazing livestock. They had to be introduced to schools and hospitals, and they had to become contributors to life.

But the others who were complaining were also right. As time went by they had been comparing themselves with what they were reading, hearing and seeing about people's lives in distant lands where all the components of civilization, money and knowledge were available. Although they extended their tolerance of backwardness by virtue of their citizenship, affiliation and coexistence, their human nature remained unchanged; for man does not compare himself with another who is less than himself.

A Sudanese citizen who lived all his life in Egypt came back to his country to compare what 'Abd-al-Nasir started out with and what we ended up with. 'Abd-al-Nasir started with the Nile Corniche in Cairo before he thought of building the High Dam in Aswan. And that was essential to attract the people's interests and to make people aware of what they can see and touch. If he had started out as we did in the heart and outer parts of the country, the early days of his administration would have been riddled with doubts, rejections and denunciations. People do not see what is beyond their field of vision, and they do not hear distant sounds. Thus those scenes and sounds remain unseen and unheard despite the certainty of their existence. They are like virtuous values that people miss only if their interests are affected.

That citizen who returned to his country after having lived through the experiences of others wondered about the utility of a ground satellite station in Nyala while people complain about poor telephone communications in Khartoum. He wondered about the utility of hundreds of kilometers of roads linking the east with the center and the west and similar roads about to be built from the north to the south while the streets in the capital where people who are aware of the need for better roads criticize the poor condition of these roads. In the fall they complain when the rain falls, and in dry weather they complain of the gaping holes in the roads.

Then he wondered about the Jonglei Canal, and he compared it with the capital. He wondered about al-Rahad Project, and he compared it with the capital. He wondered about the sugar refineries and about one of them, the Kinanah plant, which is the largest sugar refinery in the Middle East and Africa. That plant is the second largest and most productive sugar plant in the world. As far as cost is concerned, its costs are double those of the High Dam, Egypt's great imposing structure.

That citizen listed what has been accomplished in the heart of the country and in its remote areas and then asked again about the capital and about the changes that have been carried out there.

Then he repeated what the journalist, who is a friend, said: "This is a situation that breeds ingratitude."

Those who received benefits did not express their gratitude. Their voices were thus not heard above the noise created by those who have been arguing in the cities.

And those who have been arguing are not content because they cannot brag about what they cannot see. Although this reasoning is rational, it is not consistent with justice and it does not complement the returns from development that are being sought.

The Question of Justice

The most perfect model of justice is the justice of God and that of His messenger.

Islamic justice has somewhat favored the most deprived and then the less deprived. Islamic justice has leaned toward orphans, poor people and then vagabonds. Islamic justice made it incumbent upon the wealthy to designate a portion of their wealth to the deserving. Ownership is defined by sufficiency, and although that may not be deemed abundance, it is enough to make the need for charity dispensable.

The justice of God, as expressed in the verses of the Koran, deems as right giving alms to poor people first, and to the miserable second. Others entitled to alms are those who work for one, those with whom one has an emotional bond, those for whom one is financially responsible, and those to whom one has a financial obligation. Finally alms are given for the sake of God.

This is the question of justice. Its course has been indisputably set by Islam. Charity begins with the most needy first. If anything is left after that, it is to be given to the less needy. If there is anything left after that, then that would be an abundance under which justice would flourish and prosperity thrive.

What remains is the return that is being sought from development.

And here we must go back to what 'Abd-al-Nasir ended with and what we started out with.

'Abd-al-Nasir took over the affairs of the oldest state in history. It is a country that has been united since the days of King Mena. Its races have been intermingled since it became a single country going through events that occurred over thousands of years.

Egypt is in fact the gift of the Nile, not only in so far as the Nile is responsible for its prosperity, but also insofar as it contributes to its homogeneous unity along the banks of the Nile. People live all along the banks of the Nile until it meets the sea. People depend on the Nile for which there is no alternative. The Nile bridges distances; it does not constitute a barrier between the people of Upper Egypt and those who inhabit the coastal area.

But Sudan is Sudan.

The distribution of the population in Sudan is related to the country's numerous rivers. Other than the White Nile, the Blue Nile and the Great Nile, there are scores of rivers in Sudan.

People are scattered without congestion around the rivers. People have wells even in the deserts, and they have been blessed with rainfall which cultivates the land and grants life and growth to their livestock.

People can be found in Sudan all along the country's borders: from the sea to the jungle. They can be found in the mountains, in the valleys and in the prairies. People can be found over an area of 2.5 million square kilometers. It is the uncongeniality of the place that destroys blood ties and kinship relations and imposes alienation on man in his large homeland. There can be no relations without communications, and there can be no familiarity, no homogeneity and no fusion unless distances are overcome and closed and unless isolation becomes interaction. Difficult passageways have to be turned into bridges helping people become more cooperative, establish closer ties and become more friendly.

This is required because of its returns to the nation. Communications and closer ties would forge the one Sudanese nation and build a unified Sudanese homeland. What would be the use of having slogans on affiliation and slogans that called for loyalty when people in the west, in the east, in the north and in the south were living in isolated islands? What would be the use of having such slogans when transportation difficulties kept people from reaching their destinations and confirmed their isolation?

The economic return remains, as we know, the prosperity that comes from producing and marketing goods. What would be the use of having mountains of corn rising in the silos in the east when Darfur in the west is under the threat of famine because of a corn shortage?

What would be the use of having a surplus of beans and gum Arabic beyond the storage capacity at production sites? What would be the use of having beans and gum Arabic filling up homes and schools when the road to the Red Sea remains a barrier to world markets that are anxious to buy these products?

What would be the use of having the fruits of the south, the blessings of Jabal Murrah, the vegetables of al-Jazirah and the fish of al-Nubah Lake as long as this surplus of goods is allowed to rot and does not reach those different areas where these goods can be consumed?

In fact, what good is development, insofar as it is increased production, unless what is required for marketing this increased production is available? Roads are the foremost requirement for marketing goods.

What was required then, and that has been achieved, was an equation that would achieve justice and equity. What was required was an equation by means of which goods would be distributed according to people's needs. These were steps on a long road whose goal was to overcome the unfair discrepancy between rural and urban areas, between capital cities and the provinces. In addition, this equation would establish equity between the components and the needs of production in marketing, trade and integration. It would be an equation where an imbalance

would still be required since the national return from development was one that preceded the economic return, although these two courses are not mutually exclusive.

The road to development is one of patience.

First, one must be patient with oneself.

We must not rush results, and we must not be alarmed by obstacles. We must not lose heart by setbacks, and we must not hesitate to face the fact that it is arrogant and ignorant to expect to have everything perfect at the outset.

The first steps are not like the final steps. We must falter until we can stand straight. We must make mistakes until the experience is completed. We must have time and practice so that what is strange can become customary, what is difficult can become easy and what is inaccessible can become accessible.

I was standing on the platform of the train station in Khartoum, and I was about to board one of the railway cars on the train headed northeast to Sannar to dedicate the first sugar plant. A senior official stood in front of me panting and looking for the right words to say what he had to say. He had received an urgent telegram from the plant management requesting that the visit and the dedication date be postponed because one of the principal machines in the plant had become idle in the final experimental stages. [The management thought that] it would not make sense for me to dedicate a plant whose machines were idle. The management was requesting that the dedication of the plant be postponed for a matter of days until they could correct the idle machine. Thus, instead of having the bitter experience of seeing failure, I would then be there to see sugar produced.

The senior official said what he had to say, and I started walking toward the train which took off to its destination immediately. From the window of the train I saw that official who was immobilized by embarrassment. The news spread among the passengers on the train, and someone came asking in alarm about the truth of what he had heard. I confirmed it for him, and he wondered how useful that trip will be if at the end of the trip we will find nothing but silent machines and embarrassed officials.

I simply asked him to wait and see. And he saw.

He saw scores of thousands of feddans covered with green vegetation. Until a short time ago this land had been a wasteland where nothing grew but thorns. It was a wasteland that was frequented only by beasts.

He saw scores of new villages and cities that housed thousands of men, women and children. Before that time these people had been roving nomads, traveling in search of pasture [for their animals] and fleeing drought-stricken areas.

He saw scores of schools, health centers, social facilities, mosques and markets in a part of the country that had seen nothing throughout its history but the injustice of the confrontation between man's impotence and the harshness of the barren environment over which ignorance and disease cast their gloomy shadows.

He saw modern agricultural and irrigation equipment. He saw scores of canals, some of which were as wide as small rivers. He saw all that in a country that in all its history had seen nothing but the thirst of drought-stricken areas eagerly awaiting rainfall.

He and I saw all that, and he saw the people.

On the return trip I summoned him to ask him what were his impressions of what he had seen.

He spoke highly of what he had seen, but then he went back to talk about the machines at the plant which had been idled. We had a lengthy discussion during the return trip, and in the end I didn't know whether he agreed with me to please me or he was convinced by what I had told him.

I said, "The goal of development is a comprehensive one. Direct production is not its only return. The more important return from development is what development accomplishes for people. This is a precondition for what can be accomplished with people through development. This is because machines, equipment, funds and raw materials are not the only components of production. The most important component of production is the human effort, and that can only be obtained when people are settled, educated and cared for body and soul. If all that has been achieved, and that is more important and more difficult to achieve, after that the road to attain that economic return of development is easy. That economic return may be delayed, and it may be impaired, but it is inevitably linked with the people's ability to achieve it.

"It is this that is more deserving of being celebrated and commemorated. When machines become partially or even totally idle, that is simply a symptom that experience will overcome. Ultimately, it is a natural phenomenon that is associated with every attempt to embark on a new field. Postponing the visit and canceling the celebration would have been absolutely meaningless.

"We are celebrating and commemorating everything that has been accomplished and not that small part of the major constructive effort which was [temporarily] idled."

Ours is an ambitious development program whose actual costs amounted to 3 billion dollars. Its actual costs in today's inflationary prices exceed 12 billion dollars.

The price of hesitation is indeed high! Although what we've endured in building the country has not been easy, the costs we've borne [so far] have been light. We endured bitter obstacles some of which we had known about, but there were others that took us by surprise and clashed with every one of our precautions.

That which was considered had been imposed by the priorities of development and by its gradual nature insofar as it is an agreement that precedes income and an expenditure that precedes returns.

Priority was given to services because they were considered to develop people's abilities, and these were considered the most expensive means of production.

The number of primary schools rose from a handful to thousands of schools.

The number of secondary schools rose from a handful of schools all over Sudan whose names one could remember to hundreds of secondary schools for boys and girls.

There were fraternal relations between the University of Khartoum, the universities of al-Jazirah and the University of Juba. In addition there were fraternal relations with a university that has colleges of technology and specialized institutes in the west and the east. In addition, there were fraternal relations with the Islamic University of Umm Durman.

The number of students who were sent abroad to pursue undergraduate and graduate studies soared to the thousands. The number of our students abroad is now almost equal to the number of students that oil countries have abroad. And this is before we dream of finding oil in our country!

Public hospitals were built in villages before they were built in cities. Specialized hospitals were built in cities, and treatment centers became widespread in every village. We even thought of utilizing China's great experiment. It was China that introduced the innovative system of "bare-footed" physicians. Those are physicians who have enough knowledge to offer non-specialized medical services and who do not need the usually long period of time that is required for educating and training physicians.

We did in fact arrive at a similar formula. First, we expanded our medical education program, and then we expanded our educational program for physicians' assistants and then for physicians' aides. Training for all those people was to be continuous to improve efficiency and, at the same time, give them the competence they need to deal with the tremendous growth in medical services.

All of this constituted expenditures without returns and spending without producing. Education and medical treatment in Sudan are free of charge.

This led to an increase in people's purchasing power. Naturally that was not met by a comparable or an equal increase in production. Therefore, demand exceeded supplies and prices rose slightly.

On the material side of development expenditures were considerable. The cost of roads amounted to hundreds of millions [of dollars]; the cost of the pipeline amounted to tens of millions; and there were ground satellite stations, the microwave communications network, power generating installations, major agricultural projects, large factories and the sugar plants whose costs exceeded 1 billion dollars. There were also textile plants whose costs were less than that.

There were other projects as well besides those that are under construction. All this constituted expenditures without returns and spending without producing. At the same time all these projects provided large scale employment for workers: wages were disbursed and local people were employed. This too led to an increase in purchasing power, and that caused prices to edge upwards.

Under these conditions--the conditions of development--the gap grew wider between

the wages of people who were employed in development projects and people employed in various government and private sectors. This threatened the justice that was being sought. The wages of those people rose twice. Then they rose significantly when the professional assessment project was implemented. All this happened while the efforts that were being made in the hope of achieving production were still visible and concrete; however, these efforts had not yet started producing.

People's purchasing power increased again, and prices rose again.

Although unfair, all this had been taken into consideration. It was inevitable despite its burdens. This is because there was no other choice: we either had to build now and immediately or not at all. We would then live as our ancestors did, consolidating the reality of backwardness and fragmentation.

It had been taken into consideration, but it had been timed. It had also been tempered with the banners of justice which were fluttering in the skies proclaiming the unity of the Sudanese nation in the context of equality among its various sectors.

Large sections of the country were liberated from the restrictions of subsisting on bare essentials, and they set out legitimately to take their share, consuming goods and services that they had not consumed before. Those who used to be naked found out about clothing; those who had known hunger were able to satisfy their hunger; those who used to eat nothing but corn and dehydrated meat and fish found out that there were other good things to eat including sugar, meat and dairy products.

Rural areas kept some of their blessings for themselves. No longer would all the poultry be shipped out of these rural areas. Some of it and [in some cases] all of it was used to meet the needs of local consumers. In fact, rural areas began importing their needs from outside their immediate areas. Al-Jazirah is competing with Khartoum for the products of a large poultry farm. All this was done as a step in the quest for justice. However, it was also a step on a road of temporary hardships.

All this had been taken into consideration. But what about what was not taken into consideration and what was surprising? What about those matters that were stunning and unfair?

That was manifested in the fierce race between oil price increases and the increase in the prices of all goods produced by industrial and non-industrial countries that were affected by the successive increases in oil prices.

The price of oil rose gradually from 1.20 dollars in the base year (1973) to 38 dollars in the early eighties. This is the average price for oil set by OPEC. It is not the price in the free market in Rotterdam.

The increase in oil prices raised the prices of goods and services.

Shipping costs by sea, land and air rose, and insurance costs on exported and imported goods and services also rose.

Sugar prices doubled again and again. This should have made us happy because we

are all set to produce more than 2 million tons of sugar a year. Most of that sugar exceeds the needs of local consumption. However, between the promise of producing that amount of sugar and actually producing it is an interval during which we must pay for what we consume until the time comes to harvest the fruits of our labor.

What happened with sugar happened with coffee and tea. The prices of locally produced goods rose because producers were using oil, whose price had gone up, and they were drinking coffee and tea [sweetened] with sugar, and prices for all three commodities had risen. Producers had to raise the prices of their products to effect a balance. The increase in production prices was accompanied by an increase in the prices of the components of production. These prices rose worldwide as a result of the rise in oil prices, in prices for agricultural equipment and machines, and in prices for fertilizers and packaging requirements as well.

This was a cycle that began abroad, and it ended by affecting us in the country. This was a cycle that enflamed the market.

At night I would ask myself, "Could I have done anything else?"

"Could I have pursued any course other than that of comprehensive development, putting the social implications of development first before the economic implications?"

And then I thank God for inspiring me to do this!

He only inspired me to do what was wise. Otherwise, how would we have been able to stand--and to do so with hope--facing a world where the wealth of producers was growing while those who lacked the means of production had nothing but present and future despair?

Although our present life may be difficult, the difficulty is temporary. Our country will thrive and prosper after this difficulty.

What we are experiencing is more like the darkness that lingers after the night as dawn approaches. After that the sun will rise and light will prevail.

This light is visible only to those who are near the source of that light. Its early signs can be glimpsed and seen from a distance.

Those who are far away from the source of light cannot see it despite their good intentions.

I had a date with some of those people: it was a date with patience.

Chapter Seven

Personal Reflections

"If they disbelieve you, say: 'My deeds are mine and your deeds are yours. You are not accountable for my actions, nor am I for yours.'

"Some of them listen to you. But can you make the deaf hear you, incapable as they are of understanding?"

"Some of them look upon you. But can you show the way to the blind, bereft as they are of sight?"

"Indeed, Allah does not in any way wrong mankind, but they wrong themselves" [Yunis: x. 41-44].

It is people and the choices they make that remain.

And it is with oneself that one reckons.

It is only the strength of faith that protects the self from the bitterness of regret, rendering it immune to the sin of pride.

The faithful self does not disregard the truth because truth is soft-spoken, and it does not give up on justice because justice is difficult to attain. The faithful self does not disregard the need to depart from error and acknowledge what is right, and it remains undaunted by dread or lost awe.

These are objectives that people and the soul fall short of attaining.

People fall short of attaining these objectives even if they were forgiven or even if they were without sin, having committed no slips, no lapses, no errors and no sins.

However, although people may forgive others, God forgives only those whom He wishes to forgive. Although people may disregard the transgressions of others, God knows what lies in people's hearts. The soul cannot escape its reckoning, for the Day of Reckoning is that day when nothing intercedes for a person but his deeds.

This is how man is when he is unfair to himself. But what about man when he is unfair to himself by being unfair to people?

How burdensome will the review be, and how easy it would be to refuse responsibility for those deeds!

Deferment and procrastination would be merciful because they cause those who lost their rights to forget their losses and those who were treated unfairly to forget their wounds. But how can those who have been unfair to themselves escape the reckoning of the Just One on the Day of Reckoning? How can the soul escape its own reckoning for what it has ignored, thereby causing the banner of injustice, albeit small, to flutter.

It is so cruel to face people with what they hate even though what they like may appear to be merciful and may in fact harbor pain.

The passage of time, the accumulation of consequences and the appearance of fruits are so burdensome. They persuade the errant of their errors and those who have been deceived of the deception. They show the obstinate the falsehood that was behind their obstinacy even though they may have seen truth in it.

The shock is indeed a violent one, dampening enthusiasm with reasons for examination, and refuting people's convictions with arguments about the need for evaluation.

How can a person face the people within him? How can he be in their midst and be both subject and investigator; defendant and activist; errant and guide; the one in demand and the one making demands?

Some people find in all this a loss of confidence that undermines respect.

And I say how can there be respect when error is confirmed by the sin of silence? How can there be respect when the caution exercised to attain the correct course is too weak to attain it?

I see myself in people's eyes torn between the perfection they see in the position, which they think is mine--and that is unfair to perfection and to themselves--and between what I know about myself and what people know about themselves. We are not infallible, and we are not perfect. It is only God Who is perfect.

Because I know that, I admit it, and because I admit it, it is imperative that I confront it. It is necessary that I correct my mistakes.

People cheer enthusiastically for successes I do not deny. However, those who cheer for those successes are ignoring the inadequacies of those successes. They may be ignoring those inadequacies because being in the circle of light they are protected by that light from seeing the shadows.

I am therefore confronting them and enumerating those inadequacies for them.

One of them asked me about my responsibility for these inadequacies.

I told him, "I am responsible for all of them. If I were not responsible, I wouldn't be here with you now, facing you after having faced myself. If I weren't responsible, I wouldn't be sharing this confidence with you after finding out my mistake. This is the mistake of an official who assumes the responsibility of his position so that people would not assume responsibility for the mistake he made. This is the mistake of an official who thinks he is leading people on a correct course."

Another man said, "These inadequacies were the result of what was done. They were magnified by the people who came into the country, the ones who had been watching us. They are the ones who have been denying the positive and overstating the negative.

Because we were working and they weren't, we were the ones who paid the full price. In all cases that price was something right and something wrong, success and failure, progress and false steps.

I said, "If this were the most that was required of them, it would be enough. We do need those who will show us where we are lacking. That neither revokes nor denies the success we've achieved. If our success becomes dependent on a grave

equation and if it is surrounded by the errors and false steps of arrogance and inattentiveness, success itself will not intercede on behalf of these successful efforts. We are the ones who forged the past, and we are the ones who will forge the future, or this is how things ought to be."

A third man said, "You are stirring up the storms of doubt. Some people assumed a posture of doubt, and others assumed no other posture. The presence of truth, partial truth or the whole truth made no difference in the doubts some people had. This is because those people were motivated by their resentment, and that resentment was enough to stir up their doubts. Now that you've confirmed what they have been saying, what security in certainty is left for people?"

I said, "People are left with all the certainty in the world. If we do not cover up mistakes, then we are more capable of correcting those mistakes by facing up to them."

A fourth man said, "What you said is true. In fact, I can add something to it. Couldn't we have dealt with those mistakes confidentially and surrounded them with a wall of secrecy?"

I said, "Never!"

"That which belongs to the people and comes from the people ought to be laid out in front of them without any secrecy. This is the people's responsibility; it is their right and their duty. It is their responsibility because those responsible for the inadequacies come from the people even though they may not be in positions of responsibility and influence. It is the fact that people in low-level positions were silent about the early signs of inadequacies that encouraged these inadequacies to get worse at the top. It is because of the people's tolerance for that that these inadequacies grew into poisonous thorns threatening the great family tree. The people were silent, and the leaders ignored the inadequacies.

It was the people's neglect that encouraged others to be negligent and indifferent. Furthermore, this is the people's right and their duty. People have a right to know, and they have a duty to correct what goes wrong. The only way they can find out about what goes wrong and correct it is if they are confronted publicly with it.

Elsewhere I saw myself enumerating mistakes.

People heard what I said, and they agreed. They even elaborated upon the statements I made.

One man said, "Anyone who elaborates upon what you've said would be adding charges to those that have been made. He would be adding examples of inadequacies, and he would be doing that from a position of responsibility. If he agrees with you and is not dissembling, he is either aware of a mistake and is unable to correct it or he has been the beneficiary of a mistake and his motive in admitting it is to be forgiven."

That man added, "The imbalance lies in the experiment and not in those who are carrying it out." Then he told a long story.

He told a story that began on the day our view of democratic practice was formed. Our view of democracy assumed that democracy would be right and just insofar as in democracy all the people would share power by their actions and not just by their opinions. The People's participation would be active and effective.

Since people's interests are ranked on a scale that includes what they need for their daily lives, what affects the needs of their environment and then what affects the homeland and the nation, it was thought that popular government councils were to be formed. These councils would be the top powers representing the constituents, which are the village councils in rural areas and neighborhood councils in the cities. All these councils would gradually form a coalition of central councils for the division, the region, the province and the city. Ultimately, they would get together in a National Congress for Local Popular Government. This would be the highest authority, as it is the all-encompassing body that would consist of all the bases on all levels everywhere. These councils would assume responsibility for local legislation, and they would also assume responsibility for planning, implementation and follow-up on local development projects and services. Most council members would be elected, and some would be appointed. Appointed council members would be those with expertise and experience in administrative and technical affairs.

Such an organization was intended to serve as an alternative to an indigenous administration which used to manifest itself in the power of money and descent and in its direct relationship to sectarianism with its ethnic and provincial consequences. Because an indigenous administration was that power which responded to people's aspirations for justice, progress and modernization, the interaction between it and people was inevitable. However, that interaction was also governed at the same time by the fact that the indigenous administration had a tight grip on those areas that were under its influence. It controlled security, the courts and tax collection. Therefore, the new organization for local popular government was the alternative to the liberal practice which the experience of Sudan and of the Third World showed was not appropriate for confronting the existing backwardness and lack of awareness. This caused liberal democracy to be a mere facade behind which the power of money, feudalism and sectarian and tribal domination hid. Therefore, popular government in Sudan had to overcome all the negative aspects of the liberal practices. It also had to introduce people to the genuine exercise of democracy, with which people would actually realize their right to share in actual power. At the same time, that would make the elimination of central domination possible. The resources of the central government fall short of covering the needs of people in a country as large as Sudan.

That was the story of the long history, but that was not how it was related by the remonstrator who was opposed to the experiment. That man related the inadequacies [only]. He reiterated what I reiterated, but he unwittingly raised a grave question.

Based on one's concern for the experiment, does one protect it by covering up its inadequacies and mistakes?

Or does protecting the experiment require one to have the power of confrontation? Should one embark on a difficult examination of the mistakes before making any commendation and before praising any successes?

The question he raised increased the anxieties of the soul, especially since he concluded his remonstrance by opposing the entire experiment and saying that those who can offer the best testimony on this matter would be those who because of their interests or proximity would not be biased. When they testify and speak, they would do so fairly, and when they point to the inadequacies, they could not be accused of denying perfection.

He was partially fair in what he said. I can only testify against myself by virtue of my comprehensive responsibility. Under that responsibility, however, I can only protect an experiment which I hailed, called for, and looked after until it was well on its way. I can protect that experiment only by exposing its concealed inadequacies.

I see myself in another situation, becoming aware of aspects of injustice and beginning to correct them. Suddenly, however, and the people will testify to that, I become unjust in both cases.

I become unjust the day the injustice occurred, and I become unjust the day I remove that injustice.

The choice was critical like the road.

That situation began in the early months following the takeover that occurred on the eve of the anniversary of the birth of the True Religion. If you recall, this was the period that I called the path of thorns.

Our coalition had been penetrated by extremists who had joined the coalition to disrupt it. As one person in the coalition I had only my vote. Nonetheless, I do not deny that I supported nationalization and opposed confiscation. The majority, however, supported nationalization and confiscation.

Decisions were issued quickly, and the haste with which they were carried out was deliberate. Those decisions created an uproar that those in our midst who were not paying attention interpreted as enthusiasm from the people. But those who were lying in wait for us had intended that reaction to be a time bomb which they placed in our way.

And the days went by. We made it through the road of thorns; we overcame the treachery; and people forgot about the nationalization and confiscation. Those who had been enthusiastic about the process and had supported it forgot it, and the few who had yielded to it because they felt it was pointless to be distressed over it forgot it also.

Then one day a minister asked me to visit some of the confiscated homes with him to choose which ones would be selected to house guests of the state. I went with him.

In the first and last house I saw I noticed a child's toy that had been neglected and obviously damaged. At the entrance to the house I saw a child's shoe, and I walked out of the house right away.

That was quite a night.

I asked myself repeatedly about that alleged justice which was based on a grievous injustice.

What kind of justice was this that would rob a child of his toy, deprive a family of its home and deny people their legitimate right to have shelter? On the following morning I asked for a complete list of all the property that had been confiscated.

Committees were formed, but the decisions had been made before the committees were formed. The confiscated property was to be returned to its owners, and the function of that committee was to restore to the people their rights as fully as possible.

There was an outcry.

Those who had suffered from injustice recalled the injustices that were committed against them, and they became angry. The people became aware of what we had done, and they were not pleased.

The people were displeased with everybody, including me. What they did not know about the concomitant circumstances [of this decision] did not help my case with them.

The question then comes up: When one occasionally acquiesces in injustice, is one being more merciful or more unjust to oneself?

Acquiescing in injustice is indeed sinful; it is unequivocally unfair to the self. This is because Almighty God is watching. One is not to accept acquiescence in injustice one has seen even if one's silence were to guarantee people's approval.

I found myself a small man among giants.

I found myself for the first time in a large hall amidst kings and heads of state who were the symbols of an entire nation. They had come to know power, and they had found out about the secrets of Arab and international politics. I was a newcomer in their midst. The only experience I had was the ambitions I had for change. To me [what I knew about] the facts and secrets of the world and the facts I knew about the world's issues were colored by what I had read in newspapers and periodicals. In most cases these reports were far from the truth. In fact, in some cases these reports deliberately obfuscated the truth.

This was who they were and who I was when I was in their midst at an emergency Arab summit meeting that was held in Cairo in September 1970 to address the sad events in Amman.

Some of the Arab leaders spoke with equanimity about the secrets of the Arab struggle as a reflection of international struggles.

Some of them spoke with fervor about the criminal role of Zionism and imperialism who made the area's citizens perpetrate events in the area to achieve their own objectives. Some of them spoke in detail about the horror of the massacre which the Palestinian Revolution was experiencing.

Everyone spoke. They all analyzed, disapproved and condemned. And the hours went by as the conference looked for a solution.

I spoke hesitantly and remonstrated.

[I said], "Amman is the scene of the bloodshed, and Cairo despite its prestige and the prestige of those who are meeting in it is cut off from the events by distance. I suggest that the conference be reconvened in Amman or that some of the members go to Amman on behalf of the conference. It is there that our fellow Arabs who are parties to the dispute are. It is there where the bloodshed is occurring, and it is there that the dialogue should be conducted to bring an end to that bloodshed in the context of the Arab nation."

I was surprised when they agreed.

How can someone who lacked the experience they had come up with an opinion that those with the experience would adopt? It was the wisdom of practice.

They accepted my suggestion, and I went.

I went to Amman once and came back, and then I went again and [this time] I returned with Yasir 'Arafat. After that King Husayn, the king of Jordan, came.

The conference then turned from a body that was observing events which were occurring elsewhere to a forum for reconciling brothers.

Regardless of the dangers on the roads and alleys of 'Amman and in its homes during that city's sorrowful hour of darkness, I learned an unforgettable lesson that day.

I learned that confronting dangers head-on is the shortest way to overcoming them.

That was the day I celebrated the most glorious achievement of my life. One full year had passed since the signing of the peace agreement between the south and the north.

Those who took part in making that agreement came to take part in celebrating the first anniversary of the irrevocable end of the darkness of separation in Sudan.

There was a celebration in the palace and joy in the heart. Someone standing behind me whispered in my ear that the Saudi Embassy in Khartoum had been occupied and that hostages were being held. These hostages were the Saudi ambassador, the U.S. charge d'affaires and the charge d'affaires in the Embassy of Belgium in Khartoum.

Who had occupied the embassy? It was a few Palestinians, and their objective in doing so is still unknown to this day.

The director of the PLO office in Khartoum was contacted promptly because he would be in a better position to handle the matter without causing any unwanted complications.

The reply [from the PLO office in Khartoum] was a shock.

The director of the PLO office in Khartoum had left the city a few hours before the events. Doubts arose, and these doubts spun a web of dark questions.

Was the timing of these events intended to throw cold water on a day of celebration?

Was it intended to underscore the verbal rejection of unity and peace in the south which had been expressed by some Arab circles? Was that rejection intended to stab a brother in the back while he was not looking so as to rule out the possibility of that brother's treachery?

Were we to believe that bloodshed was to be our permanent destiny? Were we to believe that if an agreement were to stop the bloodshed in the south, a sudden attack would make the bloodshed continue in the north?

Was I supposed to face myself and sense the bitterness of ingratitude after having risked my life for the Palestinian Revolution and extricated its leaders from the bloodshed in Jordan?

The doubts grew, but I was still full of hope. I thought that what had happened would inevitably come to an end, and after that we would have time to blame each other.

I decided to stick to the celebration program, and on the following morning I left Khartoum and went to the south, but I was closely following what was happening in Khartoum.

What happened there ended in a massacre.

The American and Belgian charges d'affaires were killed; the Saudi ambassador was released; and the kidnappers surrendered to security officials.

What were we to do after that?

With the profound feelings they have for protecting their homes and their dignity, people in Sudan felt that their homes could be appropriated and their dignity compromised.

They felt that what was at stake here was the home as well as the dignity of each individual man, woman and child.

The Sudanese people felt that they had not been able to protect guests in their country, nor had they been able to provide shelter to those who sought their protection. They felt that their country, their skies and their trees had failed to provide security to those who had come to their country bearing tokens of friendship for their people.

The Sudanese people felt they had been duped into becoming accomplices in what happened. They felt as though they had been pushing with all their might to help someone whose idle vehicle had slipped down a steep precipice. When they pushed

the vehicle all the way to the top and got it to move on its own, the owner of the vehicle pushed them to the bottom unfairly and treacherously.

The Sudanese people felt all this, and they became angry. I became angry for them and with them. Despite the anger I had to make a choice; I had to balance the feelings of the people against the question of a nation.

I made my choice, and the court issued its verdict.

I decided that the convicted kidnappers were to be turned over to the PLO since it was responsible for all Palestinians. The PLO was to assume the responsibility of carrying out the sentence that was issued against the kidnappers in Sudan's court.

That calculated decision had its effect, its impact and its repercussions in three areas:

--As far as the PLO was concerned, this was the first instance of that organization being recognized by an Arab and an international country as the sole, legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.

--On the international scene the decision was met with anger.

--As far as the United States was concerned, it linked its anger with a boycott.

The old Soviet boycott followed the treachery and was a consequence of it. The American boycott was new. But the Sudanese people chose to be silent.

That was how the Sudanese people faced the powers of the world alone.

I received telegrams from different countries in the Arab world supporting the decision, but I did not receive a single telegram from Sudan.

There were bitter feelings about the decision even though not one voice was raised to oppose it. That has always been the difficult choice.

Does one go along with the feelings of the people, even if they were angry at what was fair and just?

Or does one adhere to what is useful for the people and avoid breaking their relationship with their genuine interests so they can retain their loyalty to a cause and their affiliation with a nation?

The difficult choice lies between the view that stems from passionate anger and the choice that makes a distinction between the genuine and the ephemeral.

What is it that makes a person impervious to the sin of doubt?

It is the guidance of God. If God wants a person to be rightly guided, he becomes impervious to doubt. If God does not want a person to stray, the combined efforts of all of mankind and the jinn to make him go astray will fail.

I received an urgent telegram informing me that the head of a neighboring African country would arrive at Khartoum Airport in a matter of hours for an urgent matter that could not be deferred. He was to visit for 1 hour after which he was scheduled to go back to his country because he had commitments that same day which required his presence. Therefore, he requested that we meet at Khartoum Airport. He wanted to disembark from his airplane and then board it again [after the meeting] without any ceremonial greetings or farewells. He also asked that our meeting be private, and he preferred that news of his visit would not be leaked to the media because the secrecy of his mission would make its success more likely.

He came, and we met.

Before we exchanged the traditional words of greeting, he took out of his briefcase an envelope that contained a number of documents. Some of these documents were reports from his embassies abroad, and some of them were reports attributed to an international intelligence agency. All these reports spoke with emphasis about a conspiracy that was about to unfold in Sudan. All the charges pointed to a major Sudanese figure whose role had been significant in bringing about the Addis Ababa Agreement. In fact that Sudanese figure was the other party in the unity and peace talks. Then after that this person's goals were determined.

--He was hoping to tighten his control over part of Sudan by virtue of his former position there before peace and unity were established.

--He wanted independence for that part of Sudan regardless of any precautionary measures and obstacles. He had contacts and international connections who could help him achieve his goal.

--He was angry because he was the number one man before peace and unity were established, but after peace and unity he assumed a position that was consistent with his status both during the time of the feud and the time of agreement.

A long list of names followed, and those names belonged to people who were being accused of cooperating with that person. They were also accused of being dedicated to his service.

I read all that, and I calmly returned the documents to the guest.

He did not conceal his astonishment, and he asked me if I had known about that. He wondered if that was why I had not been surprised and if consequently I saw no truth in the matter.

When I told him that I had not known about this, he appeared to be upset, and I understood why he would be. He had left his country secretly and had arrived in my country secretly. He had set aside this time to inform me about an imminent danger to my country. In spite of that I had taken all this quite calmly and was almost nonchalant about it. He became angry and impatient, and he got ready to stand up and leave to fly back to his country.

But I asked him to stay and to allow me to ask him a few questions. I asked him if that emphasis which was placed on one subject and reported on by a number of his embassies at different intervals did not catch his attention.

I asked him if he had stopped to ask himself about the identity of that "valuable" report which was provided voluntarily for his perusal by an unknown agency through one that was well-known. Then I asked him about the coincidence that the subject of that report was the same as that of the reports which were simultaneously sent to him by his active embassies abroad.

Then I asked him why should he be the intermediary chosen to receive such dangerous information to relay to Sudan?

He answered my questions somewhat perfunctorily. Then, as he walked up the stairs to the airplane whose engines had been running since it landed, I told him, "One seeks perfection, but it is not possible to attain it. In the very least, perfection is available only in rare cases. Thus, when we encounter it, we have to ask ourselves if this perfection is genuine or if it is a sham."

He asked me what I meant by that.

I boarded the airplane with him after he issued orders to stop the engines of the airplane so that the noise of those engines would not drown out our conversation which he thought would last long.

I talked to him about the man and his role. I talked to him about the man and his position and his effort. I even talked to him about the man's struggle to achieve peace and unity. I talked to him about all the choices that were presented to him. Out of all those choices he had chosen the one he chose. [I pointed out to him that] he who makes a choice does not rebel against that choice; it is only those who accept something under pressure or coercion who do rebel.

I talked to him about the peace that was achieved in the south. I told him how that peace had surprised and pleased friends and how it had angered enemies and some fellow Arabs who weren't quite sure whether they should be pleased with that peace or denounce it.

I talked to him about peace and unity in south Sudan. I told him how that peace and unity had upset regional and international equations and plans which had sought to use Sudan as their instrument by means of which the area would be surrounded and the continent penetrated again so as to abort its progress and drain its resources.

I talked to him about all that, and I told him, "Those who fail usually make a distinction between failure and despair, particularly immediately after the shock of the failure. It is after such a shock that they try new methods and means." I told him that he with his good intentions was one of those new methods and means.

Information would be leaked to him. That information would be confirmed when it came from various sources. Then that information would reach others, and he would take the bait. As far as I was concerned, he had no motive and no interest in this matter. Under the influence of all this, other people's reactions would cause me to step up my actions, and the crack in the newly built structure would grow and become wider, and then the whole structure would collapse.

Then I found myself warning him as though I were predicting his fate. I warned him that he himself might be victimized in the same way: he would receive deliberately planted information, which would be confirmed from other sources. Then those who are loyal to him would appear to him to be traitors and those whom he trusts would become the object of suspicion. Thus, all those who are loyal to him would disappear one by one, and he would be the one instrumental in their departure. Only those with ulterior motives would remain around him. At that time, he will be alone even though there might be scores or even hundreds of people around him. It is at that time that he becomes like a solitary tree with nothing around it to ward off the wind and the storms; that solitary tree is thus uprooted by the storms.

Unfortunately, that was the course he chose voluntarily. He was uprooted by storms when no one but hypocrites stood up to protect him from those storms.

When what I hear conflicts with what I know, I keep my peace.

When the noise grows, I look into the matter personally, and I make inquiries to ascertain what I know or to establish doubts that I've had.

When the clamor rises, it turns out to be blatant injustice or rather gloomy injustice. This is because the victim of injustice had voluntarily given up his position and had become powerless with no authority to protect himself from falsehood.

Because I know, and those who hear such things do not, I decided to oppose injustice by exposing the facts. Those I consulted with on this matter suggested that I reconsider my decision, and they had their rationale.

The storm was about to die down. In fact, it had died down. Furthermore, those who were falsely accused had retreated from the limelight where they will not even cast a shadow.

Those who spoke about this matter will forget what they said, and those who heard about it will forget what they heard. It is therefore pointless to oppose an injustice that is no longer there and to champion a victim of injustice who no longer complains of the injustice he suffered.

That rationale was as far as it could be from my feelings. I knew what people did not know. I felt that going along with that rationale would be more like withholding truth and justice, and that would be unfair.

How can one silently pass over the rights of a victim of injustice when he is convinced that that person is innocent of everything that was being said about him?

And who is to champion the victim of injustice when those who are most convinced of his innocence do not?

The more important and the more serious question was this: How could I let a few people stir up doubts about each other and not confront them with the certainty of truth?

I talked with the people about the victim of injustice.

I talked about his contributions when he took over some of the people's affairs.

I talked about his sacrifices when he relinquished what he was entitled to because he had become convinced that that was his duty.

I talked about the objective behind these doubts and how facts had been falsified and rights violated.

I said what I could say, and as I talked I was overcome by my feelings. I was in a position to know the magnitude of the contribution, and I deeply felt the injustice that had befallen those who had contributed quietly only to be rewarded by the shrill sounds of people's resentment.

People heard what I said and said nothing.

The resentful heard what I said, and they resented me too.

But I was patient, and I appealed my case to God Who knew what my intentions were. I asked God Almighty alone to judge me and to issue His just verdict against the crime of suspicion.

Months went by, and the victim of injustice appealed to the people's judgment, and they vindicated him. This was not so much a victory for him as it was a victory over those who thought they could deceive the people. They only deceived themselves.

This was a friend who one day offered me his friendship, saying that he was not looking for any reward and that he had no motives and no ambitions to fulfill in seeking this friendship. I accepted his friendship with gratitude. He did not aspire to power since he did not reside in our midst. Nor did he covet money since God had blessed him with more than he needed. I trusted him, and he gave me good advice. He was good, truthful and honest.

Whenever I sought advice, he gave me advice; whenever I asked him a question, he gave me a truthful answer. In his friendship I had the reassurance I missed when I heard from some people reports which later established that his friendship had not been offered for God's sake only.

Then one day, and I wish that day had never come,....

I received him graciously that day, and I welcomed him. Then I heard from him a report that at first stunned me. When he went on with his report, I reacted with fear to what he said. Then he left me feeling bewildered.

What he said impugned the integrity of someone I trusted. This was a trust that had been reinforced by events and by a long and close cooperation. I found myself caught between two people I trusted, and one of them was impugning the integrity of the other with what he knew with certainty.

I spent another sleepless night. At dawn I was still bewildered by what I had heard and what I knew. I was certain that in both cases I alone would lose.

If what [my friend] said were true, then the confidence I had in those I had assumed were honest was lost.

If his allegations were false, how then could I explain the reassurance I had enjoyed in his friendship.

I made inquiries without revealing my objective in making those inquiries.

I asked if that friend had a direct or an indirect interest with that person who had given me that report on him. The response I got to my inquiry was stunning.

I was told that he had asked for favors he was not entitled to and had been turned down. Then I asked myself how could I be certain of that?

Then I remembered the verses of Almighty God, and they guided me to certainty.

"Believers, if an evil-doer brings you a piece of news inquire first into its truth, lest you should wrong others unwittingly and then repent of what you have done" [al-Hujurat: xlix.6].

Finally, these are excerpts from my personal reflections. I reflected upon these matters throughout the odyssey entrusted to me by the will of God and people's declaration of loyalty. I accept its consequences, and I acknowledge responsibility for it.

Although these reflections are in one respect an examination of the soul, they are basically an expression of my dread of God.

For it is better for man to question himself before he is questioned by God on the Day of Judgment. He may then answer his Lord well.

I would say that this is a course of life to be pursued in life. One should strive for what is best and seek it. However that which is best depends upon the perfection that only believers and Muslims can hope to attain. Believers and Muslims hope to follow the course of Islam, and they hope that people follow the course of Islam before they do. They hope people will follow the course of Islam with them and after them. Islam is nothing but perfect.

Chapter Ten

The Way of Islam and the Path to Islam

"In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate: We have made you a just nation, so that you may testify against mankind and that your own apostle may testify against you" [al-Baqarah: ii.143].

We went from estrangement to alienation and to the situation we find ourselves in. The best nation created among mankind regressed, and we found ourselves ignorant of our own affairs.

Our ties with each other were broken, and we went our separate ways. We hardly got together without conflict.

We were united by our faith in the One True God and in His Koran. Our hearts yearned for a nation surrounded by God's blessings and a will that symbolized our unity, but we did not unite.

We took the outside aspects of religion, but we never came close to its essence. Our mosques were filled with worshipers, but our hearts were empty. Our minarets rose in the skies, but the banner of Islam did not fly in our midst. We lived with truth and falsehood. In Islam that is the banner of hypocrites.

We had accumulated the means of power that no other nation in the history of mankind had. But our faith weakened, and we became subject to greed and beset by danger. Our numbers grew, but our growing numbers did not enrich us. Hundreds of millions of us converged around the messenger in the country of the wicked. Through these millions the doctrine and the message of Islam became victorious, and in a matter of years the nation of Islam set out to crush the Roman and the Persian empires.

We had the numbers and the equipment. But what a difference between us and the Muslims who fought in the Battle of Badr! How similar we are to the Muslims of Uhud whose conviction was undermined by the lure of greed. But these Muslims regained their faith and stood their ground; we, however, did not regain ours and we succumbed to humiliation.

We call each other to prayer, but we do not meet to pray together. We are called upon to make the pilgrimage to Mecca, but we do not. When the mu'ezzin calls upon us to stand up for the cause of Islam, we turn a deaf ear, we harden our hearts and we do not respond.

Prayer does not consist of lining up in rows to worship God, nor is the pilgrimage a series of ceremonies and rituals. Prayer brings Muslims together because it unites them. It is the duty of Muslims to make the pilgrimage so they can come together in solidarity and cooperation and can consult with each other about matters of their religion and their world.

We speak of Islam, but we do not carry out its duties. One of those duties is payment of an alms tax. In the hierarchy of duties payment of the alms tax follows the duty of prayer and precedes that of fasting and making the pilgrimage, when God enjoined His servants to do the latter. God also enjoined Muslims to make charitable contributions for the cause of God in support of His religion and His worshipers and to assist all people.

We speak of Islam, but we forget about its provisions. We do not urge people to practice righteousness, and we do not forbid them to do evil. We openly commit abominable acts and acts that God prohibited. It were as though we were proud of this scourge: we neither cover it up, nor do we conceal it or hide it. We speak about Islam, and we forget its commands. Thus our relatives, orphans, poor people and wayfarers go astray.

We speak of Islam and we forget its morals. We denounce each other; we attack each other; and we doubt and suspect people.

We speak of Islam, and we forget its values. We do not champion truth; we do not

rebel against injustice; we do not deter the unjust in our midst; nor do we help ward off injustice from those in our midst who are its victims.

We speak of Islam, but we are closer to pre-Islamic ignorance. We are torn by fanaticism and divided by sectarianism. In fact, within the unconfining vastness of our one religion and under our One God, we fight and feud with each other as members of different factions and denominations.

We speak of Islam, but we are as far away from it as we can be. Islam is manifested in Muhammad's way, may God bless him and grant him salvation. It is manifested in the gentleness of Abu Bakr; the altruism of 'Uthman; the justice of 'Umar; the courage of 'Ali; the sacrifices of Bilal; the heroism of Khalid and the asceticism of Abu Dhirr. What a difference there is between our ancestors and their descendants!

How can this be the best nation created for Islam and yet be a nation that is alienated from Islam?

It were as though this was intended by the Almighty to be a lesson. In fact, it was a promise that the Merciful One carried out.

"But whoever helps Allah shall be helped by Him" [al-Hajj: xxii.40].

God helps only those whose faith is true. He helps those whose Islam is proper and whose manifest behavior is compatible with their innermost thoughts. God helps those who are virtuous in private and in public. He is True to His faith.

That was the nation of Islam before its alienation. God's help to that nation was duly promised because its faith was its weapon. It was its faith that struck terror in the hearts of Romans on the day of their demise. Although there were 200,000 of them, the Romans retreated in front of 3,000 advancing Muslims.

Faith was the Muslims' weapon on the day they prepared to do battle in the War of the Trench despite the siege that had been set around them by Quraysh and those who had joined it in an alliance against them. Faith was the Muslims' weapon despite a broken pledge in their midst, when the Jews of Yathrib cooperated with their enemies.

What is the significance of this nation's regression in the darkness of its alienation from Islam? This nation is more like the Romans on the day of their demise. It is more like the nation of Quraysh on the day the War of the Trench was fought. O God, save us from being unjust! But we did forget our religion, and we thus became unfair to ourselves.

How can this be the best nation created for Islam and yet be a nation that is alienated from Islam?

This is a nation that was united by its religion and its faith. It is a nation whose people have been integrated by language and culture. It is a nation whose enemies are not standing outside its doors but rather in its midst. Nevertheless, it is a nation torn by conflict.

It is a nation that has accumulated all the means of wealth.

It is a nation that has forests and rivers; it has gold and silver and what is more precious than both gold and silver. It is a nation that has fertile land and rich pastures. Above all else it is a nation rich in its manpower. It is a nation that overlooks an ocean and encompasses seas; a nation in which continents face each other; and a nation that uses several means to communicate with the world. Nevertheless, it is a nation whose resources are threatened and whose energies are idle. The manifestations of luxury in some of this nation's regions are incompatible with the poverty that is quite real for most of its citizens. This nation rejects cooperation as well as integration. Because of their conflicts some members of this nation seek help and assistance outside this nation.

It is a nation that has accumulated all the means of power.

Its millions of inhabitants constitute a resource that is available to form the largest of armies. Its tremendous wealth gives it the capability to manufacture weapons. Its depth and breadth provide it with the best defense capabilities. But in the turmoil of its disputes this nation finds itself drawn to those who are threatening it, turning to them for protection and asking for their help. The only point those parties agree about is that of being against the Arab nation. Besides coveting its wealth, those who are threatening the Arab nation resent it because of its faith. And there are those who resent it and those who disavow its faith and every faith.

This is a nation that has accumulated all the means of power.

Let this nation then assume its responsibility and gain victory for its religion. It does not have to proselytize and seek new converts, but it should enlighten Muslims who are not Arabs about the affairs of their religion. After all, those non-Arab Muslims look up to the Arab nation who speak the language of the Koran, the law of their religion. Non-Arab Muslims look up to the Arab nation whose land houses their Ka'bah, the tomb of their prophet and their Aqsa Mosque which has been blessed by God. The scholars of the Arab nation are the ones who are legally responsible for carrying the banner of Islam to them. Nevertheless, the banners of Islam in Muslim countries and in non-Muslim countries have almost been hanging at half-mast. In those countries the indifference of Muslim missionaries is no match for the anti-Islamic campaigns of persecution, isolation, and intellectual invasion which try to obscure the light of Islam in people's minds and hearts.

These are the affairs of that nation. Does one have due cause in asking about the secret behind the dignity which that nation had when Islam was cherished in it? Does one have due cause in asking about the reasons for its setback in the dark night of its alienation from Islam?

The answer to that question is self-evident. It is an established historical fact that, notwithstanding any debates or theories about closed cultural cycles which come into being, thrive, grow old, wither and die, humanity did set up a great civilization which began with an exhortation and a mission. This is an established historical fact, notwithstanding those theories that talk about a mysterious movement of history which is set in motion by an unknown force. That civilization flourished, achieved victory and realized its effective presence in a limited period of time and over an unlimited space.

A new civilization was established over a period of 23 years. This was the duration of the period of spreading the faith: from the time of the revelation until the death of the messenger. To state it more correctly, the new civilization was established over a period of 13 years, which is the duration of the period during which Islam was being proclaimed and advocated publicly, and that began with the emigration of the messenger and lasted until his death. That civilization was not related to the roots of any previous civilization: it was not an extension of any other previous civilization; nor did it expand another civilization where that call to God had emerged and through which it had spread.

The faith in whose shadow the new Islamic civilization was founded came into being in Mecca where the prevailing system was a tribal system. It was a limited tribal system where the tribes were divided into family units each of which was independent of the other. There was so much conflict among these family units that fighting would occasionally break out between them.

In such primitive social communities it was impossible to have a system of social control or an economic organization. The leadership hierarchy in such communities was in most cases determined by age. Leadership was also supervisory and honorary. Leaders were sought for their advice, but they had no legislative powers. Prevailing customs were the source of law. Whether one dared to violate the law or submitted passively to it depended upon another hierarchy that had to do with one's descent, with how many children there were within the tribe or family or with the size of the tribe, the number of its members and its economic resources. In case of a confrontation between tribes in such an environment, turning to convention [to settle disputes] remained a relative matter that depended on considerations which had nothing to do with the standards that were involved.

In the context of this understanding [of such communities], comparing the economic social, military and political system that came into being, when the call to Islam became settled in al-Madinah, with the social system that was prevalent before that time proves indisputably that the two systems are not related. Thus the assumption that Islamic civilization, which was founded under the auspices of Islam, was an extension of a civilization that was founded under the forementioned social and economic conditions which existed prior to the onset of the call to Islam proves false. It is also impossible to say that historical evolution or the movement of history, as materialists refer to it, was what forged Islamic civilization under the auspices of Islam. In addition, the products of historical evolution come about rather slowly. They are a result of events accumulating and interacting over a long period of time. We are talking about a period of time considerably longer than one decade and fractions of one decade.

Since Islamic civilization under the auspices of Islam spread beyond the geographical boundaries of its birthplace, extending itself among existing, ancient civilizations, it intermingled and struggled with them, and it achieved victory over the civilizations of the Romans and Persians. According to the customary way of looking at things that signifies that the victorious civilization had advantages which may be stated in the context of two assumptions.

This civilization may have had the means for material power. It may have had a large number of followers and advanced weapons which exceeded what was available

to its two counterparts. But it has been established and confirmed that the opposite was true. The Romans and the Persians outnumbered the Muslims. They also had more kinds of weapons, and their training and combat skills surpassed those of the invaders who were coming from the desert and who were marked by its primitive character.

This new civilization could also have comprised in its economic, political and social system attractive factors that facilitated its penetration of an opposing civilization, enabling it to score a victory over it.

This is true in part, and that truth has to do with the fact that the people of the Roman and Persian empires welcomed the components of Islamic civilization. They accepted them; they found them convincing; and they embraced them and embraced the Islamic faith. That, however, followed the military, economic and political collapse of the Roman and Persian nations, and that collapse came about as a result of the Islamic invasion.

We are then facing a unique historical phenomenon which cannot be explained in the context of old or modern scientific theories. This phenomenon is actually incomprehensible unless one's understanding of it is linked with total conviction in the role faith and religion can play in such a phenomenon. This is the only factor that gave the Arab conquerors an edge. It was under the banner of their faith that they achieved their great victory.

It was essential that we reflect upon this matter before moving on beyond the question to discuss what went wrong with the best nation among mankind after its alienation from Islam and how that can be corrected.

Figuring out the association between the malady and the body that is afflicted with that malady is half the job. As far as what we are going through is concerned, however, it is everything that is required for this nation to regain its well-being, resume its role and carry out its mission for humanity, thereby persevering in its ancient role and reaching the goals of its True Religion.

What was wrong with the nation was its alienation from Islam. Therefore, the remedy lies in returning to Islam. But how is that to come about?

I must ask the reader to bear with me here and allow me to digress. I admit at the outset that I am not the best person who can answer that question. I have nothing more to say about this matter than what I know innately as a faithful Muslim. I have not had the opportunity or the skill to study the affairs of my religion in depth. There are people who are more enlightened than I am and who are more knowledgeable about Islam than I am. As far as religion is concerned, I am one of those who has barely scratched the surface. I look upon religion with conviction and faith. I accept my religion and I am convinced that it is the depth and breadth of man's faith that will sustain him in this life and in the hereafter. I know that I do not know enough about Islamic jurisprudence and about Islamic law and its provisions, and I admit that. God granted expertise in that area to the scholars among His worshipers.

When the noble messenger frowned upon a blind man for embarking upon something he could not understand, God Almighty reproached His prophet in the Koran for

turning away from a blind man and frowning upon someone who could not see and could not distinguish between a frown and a look of satisfaction.

This is the precedent that the Merciful One wanted to set: He wanted every Muslim to have the right to look into the affairs of his religion. He wanted every Muslim to make the effort to establish his faith. God wanted no barriers, no boundaries and no bars set up in front of those who wished to exercise their independent judgments to prove their faith regardless of how much education or knowledge they had.

Let me appeal for some of this infinite mercy and ask the reader to bear with me once again so I can discuss the point I wanted to discuss as a powerless Muslim, divested of all distinction but the highest one. This is the distinction that one acquires when he declares that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is His messenger. This is the distinction that allows a man to exercise his independent judgment on matters of his religion. It also gives others the right to express their objection if they find that that judgment departs from or deviates from its one and only intended objective: that of scoring a victory for Muslims and for Islam.

How can this nation's alienation be brought to an end? How can this nation be restored to its True Religion?

Let me put my trust in God and say what I think.

This nation can be restored to its True Religion in the same way it was called upon to adopt that religion the first time.

The call to Islam began and scored its victory in the context of a course that the messenger of God adhered to. This course is the course of Islam. The call to Islam has never been detached from man's spiritual and material needs. In fact, the call to Islam came to respond to those needs and to meet them. The call to Islam was a direct response to the prevailing conflicts and complications in pre-Islamic society, a society that was known for its injustice, its immorality, its oppression and its indifference to the physical, mental and intellectual aspects of man's humanity. The call to Islam called upon people to worship one God, and it condemned the worship of idols. It immediately joined forces with every enlightened thought that refused to accept the divinity of those idols. Because Islam is enlightened, it also refuses to accept the notion that existence is as purposeless as an effect without a cause, as creation without a creator and as a system without a regulator.

The call to Islam came face to face with this enlightened intellect to put an end to its tyranny and bestow upon it a conviction that it had often aspired to intuitively without being able to define it. Therefore, it was no coincidence that Khadijah, the daughter of Khuwaylad was the first one to profess faith in Muhammad, not because of their relationship as husband and wife, but because of a relationship that preceded and followed that marriage. Khadijah was related to Waraqah ibn Nufal. Their relationship was one that enabled the monk, who had devoted his life to the study of divine religions in the books of ancestors to share with her some of his ideas. These ideas undermined Khadijah's faith in idols and aroused in her mind a yearning for conviction. She found that

conviction in the message of Muhammad, the messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him salvation, and she responded to it. This is because the bond of marriage alone is not enough to explain Khadijah's quick response to the prophet. For she was known to be well off and to be from an old, high-born family. If she had not been convinced of Muhammad's message, she would not have responded to it. At least she would not have responded so quickly, because she would have feared for her fortune and for her status from the tyranny of Quraysh.

Khadijah, who lived with her husband before the Revelation came to him when he was in isolation in the cave of Hara', understood the significance of that voluntary isolation. She also understood the reasons for it. She understood that the young man who had consummated his marriage with her was in a state of spiritual confusion that she herself had suffered from and that she was still suffering from because her mind and her heart were refusing to rely on those idols that were hanging on the walls of al-Ka'bah like an excuse behind the various phenomena of the universe. Whether Khadijah's doubt was innate or the result of the conversations she had had with her relative, Waraqah ibn Nufal, that doubt helped her help her husband overcome the predicament of his confusion in isolation. It also enabled her to withstand that which made her husband tremble when he received the Revelation for the first time. In fact, she sought out the same man, Waraqah ibn Nufal, and asked him to explain the significance of that great event.

This then was an appeal to worship God that coincided with a person's instincts. It was therefore followed by faith.

As we know, Abu Bakr al-Sadiq was a man of considerable wealth and knowledge. He had read about ancestors, and he had reflected upon matters and given them some thought. He must have encountered what Khadijah had encountered before him. He must have experienced patience, anxiety and a longing for conviction. When he believed in Muhammad's message, he believed in a doctrine that put an end to his confusion and did away with that vague anxiety that would come over him when he compared the idols that people worshiped with the enlightened ideas he had read about in the books of the ancients.

'Ali ibn Abu Talib is that lad who was one of the first young men to believe in the call to Islam. His life after that which shows him as a youth, a young man, and an old man, may reveal to us the mind of the boy. Abu Talib was a scholar of jurisprudence, an orator, a rebel and a thinker.

Is it possible for an intelligent person such as this one to accept without question at any stage of development the notion of worshiping stones?

There were others who quickly professed their faith. The powerless of the world who were bound by the shackles of slavery professed their faith.

Among those were Bilal ibn Rabah, 'Ammar ibn Yasir, Sahib ibn Sinan al-Rumi and Khibab ibn al-Arth. There were others who were shackled by bondage, degradation and slavery.

What did the rebellion of those people against the religion of their masters signify? What great power was made available to them, enabling them to assume that courageous posture at a time when the call to Islam had no support and no supporters?

There are no answers to these questions. Nothing awaited those people but the horrible torture they endured for their faith in the great message. But why? They accepted the message and endured the torture because the essence of the message, its principles and its goals coincided directly with their suppressed yearning for justice and liberation. Therefore, they clung to it, and they died for it.

All this means that the call to Islam took hold among the people because it met all their intellectual, psychological and material needs.

The call to Islam did not lag behind the people's aspirations; they did not overlook it and ignore it. The call to Islam did not exceed what they had been hoping for so they did not turn away from it in despair. The call to Islam coincided exactly with the social and economic conditions of an age, and these people adopted the religion of God; after them people came in droves to profess Islam as their religion.

The Koran remains an inimitable book, and Islam remains a marvelous religion.

The inimitability of the Koran lies in the fact that it is a book for all times and all places. Not only did it encompass people's affairs where and when the Revelation was made, but it also provided guidance to all the world. It is a timeless book: it comprised the past with the stories and lessons mentioned therein, and it comprised the present. The present here is the absolute present as well as the present then, the time the Koran was revealed. The Koran comprised all the issues of that time. Then it comprised [the issues of] the continuous present which goes on forever.

The Koran also comprises the issues of every age. It comprises the intellectual, economic, social and cultural issues of every age no matter how recent these issues are. It were as though the Koran was revealed to deal only with those issues or as though these issues were found only in its context.

"...Surely the spider's is the frailest of all dwellings" [al-'Ankabut: xxix. 41]. This is a noble verse that has been known to mankind for 1400 years. How can one imagine that such a statement was revealed to the noble messenger of God under conditions when specialized studies in biology were not available to people?

Under the conditions of that time one's mind goes back to the obvious frailty of a spider's cobweb. The exegesis for that verse is authentic and acceptable.

But afterwards when God guided the human mind to develop, He led man to understand relative measurements. Besides, God made man understand that the web woven by a spider was proportionate to its size and it was flexible as well. Thus, it cannot be deemed as frail as it was thought to be according to the old standards.

And here biology reveals something new and stunning about the inimitability of the Koran. It's been established that spiders eat their own offspring and their mates. Are there weaker family relations than these relations? Are there more frail homes than these? Herein emerges a question: Should exegesis of the Koran in this age be made in the context of scientific discovery that confirms the inimitable quality of the Koran? Or should one adhere to the old exegesis? It is known that the Koran provides authority for the new exegesis. When the Koran talks about shelter for man and his family, the Koran is talking about homes.

"Believers, do not enter the dwellings of other men until you have asked their owners' permission and wished them peace" [al-Nur: xxiv.27].

When the Koran talks about shelter for ants, the Koran is talking about dwellings: "Go into your dwellings, ants,..." [al-Naml: xxvii.18].

Then we see science leaping forward while the old exegesis remains unchanged. When science and exegesis contradict each other, hard-liners may find themselves inclined to deny concrete scientific phenomena without making the effort to reflect upon the verses of the Koran. If they were to reflect upon the verses of the Koran, they would find that new scientific discoveries had been written down a long time ago in the book. Let me cite examples of that.

Some people refused to believe that man did land on the moon. They attributed their refusal to believe that feat to the fact that there was nothing in the Koran about man landing on the moon. Therefore, [they argued], something like that could not happen. Although that principle is wrong, there is a passage in the Holy Book that leaves no room for any mystery about this matter. The prophet's midnight journey to the seven heavens and the night of that ascension [the 27th of Rajab] are two facts in the Koran. The Koran mentions that Muhammad, the messenger of God, did ascend to the heavens.

Since Muhammad was commanded by His God to affirm his humanity, as is mentioned in the Koranic verse, "Say: 'I am but a mortal like yourselves'" [al-Kahf: xviii. 110], what happened to him could happen to other humans even though the means, the goal and the distance traveled may differ.

In fact both the jinn and humans can travel through the heavens and the earth, as in the Koranic verse: "Mankind and jinn, if you have power to penetrate the confines of heaven and earth, then penetrate them! But this you shall not do except with Our own authority" [al-Rahman: lv.33].

Man does have the ability to travel through heaven and earth, but he can do that only when he is authorized. That authorization may be divine and it may come directly to him as it came to the prophet in his night journey. Or it may come from knowledge, which comes from God too. God bestows knowledge upon those He chooses among His worshipers.

Then we see verses in the Koran that come close to speaking of discoveries and calling attention to them. But these discoveries were made hundreds of years after the Revelation. Nevertheless, exegesis says nothing about those verses and does not refer to them. Exegesis is silent when misguided people declare that religion and progress are incompatible.

There is a Koranic verse that indicates clearly not only that the earth is a sphere, but it also calls attention to irregularities in that sphere. The existence of these irregularities was established a few years ago by sensitive devices. The noble verse states: "After that He spread the earth..." [al-Nazi'at: lxxix. 30]. Spreading the earth is a reference to the earth's elliptical shape. The most recent picture of the earth as transmitted by satellites confirms earth's elliptical shape and not the spherical shape it was thought to have.

The point I want to make in all this is that the old exegesis of the Koran is not

carved in concrete. Not only are efforts required to refute the false claim that religion and science are mutually exclusive, but these efforts are also required to prove that the Koran is inimitable and that it has always anticipated scientific discoveries.

The great role of Islam, which began with the onset of the call to Islam, thus continues. Islam continues to meet the needs of man under the conditions of his society. It responds to his questions; follows up on his needs; and stays in step with his mental and social development. Islam can do that.

This is the first step to be taken on the road of restoring the nation to its True Religion. But this is not all that is required. Islam is an integrated system in whose context man's relationship with his God is defined. Islam also defines the creative exchange in man's relationship with his fellow man.

A Muslim is not just someone who prays, fasts and goes on a pilgrimage when he can. Unless a Muslim's deeds benefit people and preclude harm to himself and to others, his prayers will not be accepted even if he were to pray day and night; his fasting will not be accepted even if he were to fast every day; and his pilgrimage will not be accepted even if he were to stay in Mecca from the date of his birth till his death. Grave offenses like consuming alcohol and gambling are prohibited not just to keep man from hurting himself, but also because they cause man to hurt others.

The damage that alcohol inflicts upon others becomes manifest when one has to deal with someone whose faculties are impaired, and that can be dangerous.

The damage that gambling inflicts upon others is manifested in the losses that are shared by gamblers. When one party wins, the other certainly loses.

Although the two parties who commit fornication are responsible for an act they did voluntarily, their sin was committed at the expense of a third party who was not involved in this hateful relationship. It is inevitable that that third party will be hurt. That third party is the product of that relationship: an illegitimate child. He is the party that was not involved in an illicit sexual relationship. Despite that fact, that child bears the economic, psychological and social consequences of that illicit act.

Islam is also a collection of values, rules of conduct and organized relations in the context of Islam's provisions with society.

Restoring the nation to Islam after its alienation necessarily means that all members of that nation are to adhere to these provisions, morals and values.

But how will this come about?

Once again [I'll say] it is to come about in the same way the call to Islam began. I don't want to cite here what others have said to justify the point I want to make. I don't want to say once again that we are living in a society of pre-Islamic ignorance and that therefore we have to start all over again.

God forbid! Muslims are naturally disposed to Islam, and that protects them from

the ignorance of pre-Islamic days. It is that fact which has actually protected Muslims from sliding into materialistic thought despite the glitter of the claim and propaganda that materialistic thought would establish the course of social justice that is available.

What I am referring to is that this is the dark night of alienation. The lengthy separation from Islam was not an empty night of darkness that we entered and that we would leave without being in some cases profoundly affected by it while in other cases superficially affected.

This was a long night that was not filled by a vacuum. It was filled with cultural influences, habits of conduct and social values that were planted deeply in people's hearts. The danger does not lie in the impossibility of a major shift, but the major danger lies in the fact that the shift may lead to a clash for which no preparations would be made in advance. This would be a clash between values that became deep-seated as a result of a long period of coexistence and values that are authentic, noble and desirable.

Herein lies the risk: it does not lie just in rejecting what is new, but rather in taking sides against what is new to justify not accepting it. We thus lose our case in its early stages. In fact, we even lose the hope of continuing the effort to achieve it.

This is what I had in mind. We are to begin restoring this nation to Islam as the call to Islam was begun: gradually. Even as far as the prophet was concerned, the message was revealed to him in secrecy lest the newborn idea be eliminated before it had a chance to establish its roots.

Then it was revealed to him that he was to make the call to Islam in secret.

After that he could call the people to Islam publicly.

When the first converts to Islam adopted Islam, the ignorance which preceded Islam responded with tyranny, oppression and torture. Herein lies the wisdom of the noble messenger: He would not allow the pure fledgling idea to face the storms of tyranny before it became strong. In fact, he had ordered the earliest believers to emigrate to Ethiopia because he feared for them and for the noble faith in their hearts. 'Uthman ibn 'Affan, 'Umar ibn Sa'id ibn al-'As, al-Zubayr ibn al-'Awam, al-Aswad ibn Nufal and others emigrated.

If the messenger had wanted them with him, he could have kept them for support in the face of any harm. But he preferred to protect them at this stage in preparation for subsequent and future confrontations. That then was a gradual process.

Even prayer: the prophet alone was charged to pray; then members of his family were charged to pray, and then believers.

The cornerstones of Islam are to be met gradually. The alms tax is to come before charity until people's hearts become accustomed to giving and making contributions.

Even in forbidden acts the gradual principle manifested the wisdom of the one who knew what lies in people's hearts.

A gradual process then is what is required.

People are to be made to see the light of truth in their religion.

People are to be transported from an age in which misguided people claimed that religion and science were mutually exclusive to an age in which people become convinced that religion is science.

We are to proceed gradually in what we want people to do to illustrate the great values of Islam.

We are not to make religion difficult for people. We are not to resort to generalizations and prohibit what is right and what is wrong. We are not to scare people away from religion. Islam should provide people with equanimity and reassurance. God is forgiving and merciful.

Virtue is evident and vice is evident. God made that plain in the verses of the Koran. "He has already made plain to you what is forbidden..." [al-An'am: vi.119].

In the tradition the noble prophet said, "What God permitted in His book is permissible, and what God forbade is forbidden. What He said nothing about is exempt."

If proceeding in a gradual manner is the course of Islam, then the hostility between Islam and life is false.

The verses of the Koran state: "Say: 'Who has forbidden you to wear the decent clothes or to eat the good things which Allah has bestowed upon His servants?'" [al-A'raf: vii.32].

"Believers, do not forbid the wholesome things which Allah has made lawful to you. Do not transgress; Allah does not love the transgressors" [al-Ma'idah: v.87].

"Allah would lighten your burdens, for man was created weak" [al-Nisa': iv.28].

"Allah desires your well-being, not your discomfort" [al-Baqarah: ii.185].

Salman al-Farsi, one of the prophet's honorable companions advised Abu al-Darda' against wearing himself out in worshipping God. Abu al-Darda' used to stay up nights and fast days. Salman al-Farsi said, "You have an obligation to your eyes, and you have an obligation to your family. Fast and break the fast; pray and sleep."

The great messenger of God heard that advice and said, "Salman does know what he is talking about."

This is then a gradual process. It is one that makes matters easy for people.

Let me continue discussing the subject I am discussing, asking the reader somewhat diffidently to bear with me. I would say, "Restoring the nation to Islam after the long night of alienation ought to begin once again as the call to Islam began. Let me cite my proof for that."

--"The call to Islam became settled, and it scored a victory and spread among those who believed in it out of a sense of commitment and not because they were coerced.

--"The call to Islam confronted the oppression of pre-Islamic ignorance in Mecca. It faced a shortage in funds, manpower and gains in al-Madinah. But the people withstood, not because they had to but because their commitment was their steadfastness.

--"The call to Islam faced possible annihilation by the armies of Quraysh and its allies and by the cunning of the Jews of al-Madinah and those who sided with them. The soldiers of God were the soldiers of victory. None of them had been forced to fight for the cause of God.

--"After defending itself the call to Islam launched an attack inside and outside the Arabian Peninsula. Was the army of Muslims forced to fight, or were Muslim soldiers committed to their faith?"

Those were the best people in the wilderness. Their commitment was true; their faith was true; their Islam was true; and their effort was true. Then there were the dissemblers and those who conceal what they harbor in their hearts. They can attest to the vileness of forcing people to do something out of fear and out of greed.

What other means do we have to restore the nation to Islam from the predicament of alienation but to strive to make people adhere to their convictions? This is the role of those who advocate the cause of Islam, if they are truly determined to play their role. That determination can only be affirmed by setting an example.

People follow the course of their guardians, and all of you are guardians and all of you are responsible for those who are in your charge.

Chapter Eleven

The Guardian and Those in His Charge

"Muhammad is Allah's apostle. Those who follow him are ruthless to the unbelievers but merciful to one another. You see them adoring on their knees, seeking the grace of Allah and His good will. Their marks are on their faces, the traces of their prostrations" [al-Fath: xlviii.29].

How can the roads people are to follow be illuminated so they can see clearly where they are going in the dark night of alienation?

What would illuminate for people the road on which they are to return to Islam after a lengthy alienation from it, from its course and from its values?

This is the responsibility of a guardian. It is his obligation under Islam. He is obligated by his faith to show people the way, and he is obligated by his responsibility for people's righteousness in the afterlife and in this life.

Although people are responsible for their own righteousness in the afterlife,

each according to what he gained, that righteousness is not unrelated to the righteousness they exercised in this life. This is why people have a guardian in their midst: he is the one who commands them to do virtuous deeds and forbids them to do evil. That guardian distinguishes for people the boundaries between their rights and their duties. He affords them their rights, and he asks them to carry out their duties. He seeks recourse in justice, and he commands people to be charitable. He helps people meet their needs as long as they themselves help themselves with their money and their effort.

In Islam this is the mark of faith, and it is crowned by the profession of faith. The mark of faith cannot be replaced even by prayer, which a believer would perform throughout the night and early in the mornings and evenings. The righteousness people practice with their religion and their righteousness in this life are inseparable.

In the early days of Islam the only way for people to attain righteousness was through their deeds and their faith. God and His messenger promised hypocrites the torment of the fires of hell because they did not follow their words with actions, and they did not show what they harbored in their hearts. They professed the faith and performed the prayers, but their deeds were more like the deeds of godless people. They were therefore closer to the fires of hell than to the source of life.

People's righteousness in this world and in the hereafter is the responsibility of a guardian. But how is that to be accomplished?

The passage of time prevented people from recognizing the connection between the glorious deeds of ancestors and the values of Islam. Therefore, people sought for themselves a course other than that of their ancestors. But they were misguided, and the fact that they were misguided weakened them. Their weakness caused them to become misguided further and to stray further from the true path.

The enemies of Islam became numerous, but they were not able to harm Islam. They were, however, able to harm the Islamic values that people cherished. Therefore, after dignity people knew degradation, and after having power they became weak. People found themselves at a loss in a land that had accommodated them when their hearts were filled with faith.

The values of Islam were the banners of Tariq when he sailed the seas to achieve victory or to die in battle.

Islam was alienated in the land of Tariq when its values were no longer cherished by men. Tears were shed when the light of Islam vanished from the skies. "He cried like women over property he did not protect like a man."

People ignored the secret of their fall. They did not realize that they had a weakness that was associated with another. They thought it was something they had failed to achieve.

The weakness did not lie in their [failure to] return to their origins or to adhere to their authentic Islamic values. The weakness lay in their eagerness to adopt new values that were coming into their country. They did not realize that

those values were not suitable for them and that they were against them. Those values were like a disease in a body that had become accustomed to the disease. Although the body was sick, its immunity to the disease had grown. If the disease were to be transmitted to a body that was not used to it, it would exhaust and waste that body.

Those values were against the people because they were forcibly imposed by conquerors and by the will of colonialists and then made to spread in their midst. What is imposed by conquest cannot be accepted by the sound heart and the free will. If man's free will gives in, it would have yielded to the notion of being on the receiving end and of being passive and not taking the initiative.

These values were against the people because they had come to them attached to a history that was not theirs, values other than those which they believed in, and development they had surpassed and renounced when Islam became a stranger to them. They replaced the evil with the good and the inferior with the superior.

These values were against them because they divided them further. Those who were loyal to their religion avoided these values, and those whose faith was weak became preoccupied with them. People then became divided into two categories: those who denounced evil but could not ward it off, and those who committed evil deeds and saw their crimes in the eyes of relatives and neighbors.

These values were against them because they stripped them of their abilities to change, to thrive and to build progress.

These values instilled in people habits of idleness. They classified work and issued these work classifications to determine status. Manual labor was deemed lowly, but intellectual work was exalted. These are values that are not known in Islam; nor did Islam call for them.

The messenger of God used to mend his own shoes.

The messenger of God used to shave his own beard; he used to wield his own pickaxe and join believers in digging trenches.

The messenger of God told freedom fighters to refrain from [the following] when they conquered a village: "Do not kill newborn infants, women, old men on their death bed or hermits in seclusion."

He also told them, "Do not strike down palm trees, cut off trees or demolish homes."

The messenger of God repeated his warning to freedom fighters when they were fighting in al-Ta'if against the tribe of Thaqif and Hawazin. He wanted to dissuade them from cutting off the grapes because God had made those grapes grow out of His mercy for people.

These are the values of Islam.

What then were those values that came to us?

They were the product of centuries of alienation.

Cities had grown; villages had been abandoned; the tasks involved in cultivating the soil had become menial; and manual labor had become degrading.

These values were against the people because along with them had come those who proclaimed themselves superior. Then they departed and left behind signs of haughtiness not grandeur.

These values were against the people because they came from people whose condition was like that of people on the Day of Resurrection: everyone will have his albatross hanging around his neck, and he will be preoccupied exclusively with that. There is no integration, no cooperation and no mercy among those people. Neighbors are not neighborly; the weak are not merciful; people who ask for charity do not get it; and a poor person's plea goes unheard.

These values were against the people because they were transferred to them by someone. It is inevitable, if the value systems were to oppose each other, that the main source of these values will conquer the branch. And that was what happened.

These values were against the people because they thought the pressure generated by need would make them creative. But time turned against them. They did not return to the status of their ancestors to become pioneers of science and discovery, giving the world the gifts of their discoveries. Instead, they became beggars standing outside the gates of the world and asking for favors.

These values were against the people because they portrayed religion as the enemy of thought, and faith as the enemy of knowledge. Therefore, some of them saw in religion nothing but ignorance, and some of them saw in knowledge nothing but godlessness. God does work in mysterious ways indeed!

These are some of the products of the night of alienation from Islam.

What is the right course to return to Islam so that a guardian can lead those in his charge to it?

It is here that people who exercise their independent judgments disagree. I would not settle that disagreement by declaring my own opinion on this matter. Instead, I would cite examples of what may be erroneous, what may be flawed and what may prove beneficial to people.

There are those who say the course we should follow is one of forcing people to follow their religion.

And there are those who say that our course should be one of speaking to people courteously and giving them good advice.

And there are those who say we should set a good example for people.

It is here that we must pause and reflect.

First of all, we have to declare that people are following their religion: they are filling up mosques; they are performing their prayers; they are fasting

during the holy month of Ramadan; and those who can go on a pilgrimage do. There isn't among Muslims anyone who denies his religion and deserves to be treated like a retrograde: his life would be spared if he returns to Islam, but he would be killed if he doesn't.

There isn't among Muslims anyone who does not yearn to combine his Islam with his faith and his conviction with his deeds. There isn't among Muslims anyone who does not yearn to make his intrinsic nature compatible with his appearance and his intentions consistent with his deeds.

In order for this to happen a Muslim has to live in a society sheltered by the banners and authentic values of Islam whose source is Islam.

The question then is this: How can an authentic Islamic society be established?

Is it up to a guardian to determine that? Does he issue an order one evening and the night of alienation would dissipate before sunrise? If he were to do that, would this be something he would do to people or for them?

It is self-evident that a guardian can only do that with the people. If the matter were up to one individual and his will, the prophets and messengers would not have suffered from the consequences and responsibilities of the call to Islam. If God wanted all people to become believers, they would. However, it was God's will that faith come to people through conviction. God wanted people to be free to choose voluntarily either to be rightly guided or to be misguided. With His books and His messengers God Almighty wanted to help man become wise. Beyond that guidance belongs to those who will be rightly guided.

Furthermore, what we aspire to in that night of alienation is not the return of Islam to people, whereby Islam would be imposed by the will of a guardian. What we want instead is that people go back to Islam. And that is up to them.

We are not looking forward to having people perform their prayers; they are doing that already. Nor are we looking forward to them professing the faith; they are already doing that. We rather want them to be true to themselves and to their religion, as was mentioned in the revealed noble verse.

"Righteousness does not consist in whether you face towards the east or the west. The righteous man is he who believes in Allah and the Last Day, in the angels and the Scriptures and the prophets; who for the love of Allah gives his wealth to his kinsfolk, to the orphans, to the needy, to the wayfarers and to the beggars, and for the redemption of captives; who attends to his prayers and pays the alms tax; who is true to his promises and steadfast in trial and adversity and in times of war. Such are the true believers; such are the God-fearing" [al-Baqarah: ii.177].

These are the characteristics of a Muslim. They are characteristics that transcend duty. These are characteristics that a Muslim imposes on himself because of his conviction and his commitment.

Islam, which neither acknowledges nor approves the right of a guardian to claim divine right of representation, entrusted the matter of the guardian to the

people. If they wish, they may acknowledge him as their leader. But if they were to believe rightly or wrongly that he was not acting according to what they deem to be their interests, they may withdraw from him that acknowledgement of his leadership.

Thus, the power of a guardian is tied to the will of those whose affairs he looks after. If he were to force them into something that they were not ready for, they will either yield without being convinced or they will terminate the legal power he has over them.

And it is here that the gloom of the night of alienation thickens. Every Muslim and every believer who is protected by his faith would refuse to have his religion subjected to that. Every Muslim would refuse to have virtue subjected to a test in which it could be vociferously rejected.

Moreover, if we were to persist in forcing people to follow the values of their religion, what fruits would we harvest?

Although we may have power over people's outward actions, we would not have power over their innermost thoughts. If people were forced into something that they do not believe in, the only light we will be bringing to that night of alienation is the gloom of hypocrisy.

If we were to force people to adhere to what we like for them, and if they were to accept that without believing in it, who then can ward off for them the temptations to err that surround them? The stance people would assume against what could ruin their religion can stem from no one else but themselves.

But it may be that the proponents of coercion have something else in mind.

Maybe what they have in mind is that people ought to be held accountable for appearing to violate the values and morals of Islam.

I would ask this question immediately: Do the values of Islam manifest themselves in what is obvious, or do they also lie in people's hidden intentions? And what if people were to conceal their deeds? Wouldn't we be once again faced with hypocrisy? God deems hypocrisy the companion of godlessness or the closest thing to godlessness.

It may be that proponents of this school of thought favor a hard-line approach, that would incriminate people's actions and strike fear in their hearts. This means that we would not be seeking in people the conviction of the committed, but that we would rather be seizing from them the dread of those who have been coerced.

Not only would this method be at odds with the nobility of the objective, but it would also conflict in a fundamental way with Islam, with the Koran and with the course of the messenger.

In the True Religion, good deeds wipe out evil deeds. One good deed would wipe out 10 evil deeds; forgiveness precedes guilt; pardon precedes error; and repentance is available to every penitent sinner. There are numerous revealed verses in the Koran about this matter.

"Say: 'Servants of Allah, you that have sinned against your souls, do not despair of Allah's mercy, for He forgives all sins. He is the Forgiving One, the Merciful' [al-Zumar: xxix.53].

"Allah will not forgive those who serve other gods besides Him; but He will forgive whom He will for other sins" [al-Nisa': iv.48].

"He that does evil or wrongs his own soul and then seeks pardon of Allah, will find Allah forgiving and merciful" [al-Nisa': iv.110].

"But if you overlook their offenses and forgive and pardon them, then know that Allah is forgiving and merciful" [al-Taghabun: lxiv.14].

"Rather let them pardon and forgive. Do you not wish Allah to forgive you?" [al-Nur: xxxiv.22].

There are numerous verses in the Koran in which the Merciful God talks about His forgiveness and His pardon. These verses talk about worshipers appealing to God for His forgiveness and pardon. This is because He is the Forgiving One, and He is the Lord of piety and forgiveness. There are 225 such verses in the Koran.

In fact, in various instances in some chapters of the Koran, this meaning was emphasized and affirmed repeatedly.

In the chapter, al-Baqarah, there are five verses on forgiveness; in Aal 'Imran, there are three. Verses that describe Almighty God as the Forgiving One are also numerous: there are four of them in the chapter, al-Tawbah; four in al-Naml; three in Fatir; two in Saba', al-Furqan, al-Isra', al-Mujadilah and al-Mumtahanah. And there are nine such verses in the chapter, al-Nisa'.

The Merciful God spoke about forgiveness in five verses of the chapter, al-Baqarah and in three verses of the chapter, Aal 'Imran. God speaks in the historical present about forgiving people in five verses of the chapter, al-Nisa'; in three verses of Aal 'Imran; and in two verses of the chapters, al-Anfal and al-Shu'ara'.

This is above and beyond what is mentioned in the rest of the Koran about repentance, penitence, pardon and waiver of punishment.

Islam is not a religion that scares and threatens people and incriminates their actions. It is a religion of conviction, acceptance, pardon and forgiveness. It is a religion that promises [believers] paradise.

On the day of victory in Mecca the noble messenger declared that he would pardon all those who had sent him away from his people and had harassed him on this earth until the tables were turned against them.

He asked non-believers, "What do you think I will do to you?"

He answered his own question, and he told them, "You are free to go."

And here is the noble messenger. He was inspired to send the son of Abu Talib

and al-Zubayr ibn al-'Awwam after a woman who had sneaked out of al-Madinah. They came back and brought back with them a message from her. She was on her way to the godless people of Quraysh to tell them that Muhammad was making preparations to conquer Mecca.

The man who had sent the message, Hatib ibn Abu Balta'ah, stood in front of the messenger and said, "O Messenger of God, don't judge me hastily because, by God, I do believe in God and in His messenger. I have neither changed nor altered my faith. But I am a man who has no family and no relatives. Then I was informed that I had a son and a family, and I went along with that, thinking that since I had missed the boat of marriage in Quraysh, I might find in their midst someone who would protect my relatives."

Ibn al-Khattab trembled at what he heard. The man was a Muslim who had emigrated and had seen the battle of Badr and fought in it. He saw in the man's behavior what was worse than hypocrisy. He was appearing to people to be following their religion, and yet he was helping their enemies against them.

Ibn al-Khattab, may God be pleased with him, cried, "Let me cut off the head of this dissembler, O messenger of God."

The messenger smiled. He was indifferent to Ibn al-Khattab's anger as he said, "And how do you know 'Umar? Maybe God looked at the people of Badr and told them, 'Do what you will; I have forgiven you.'"

Concerning that event, verses of the Koran have been revealed that do not question his pardon but rather use the event as a lesson to believers.

"Believers, do not make friends with those who are enemies of Mine and yours. Would you show them kindness when they have denied the truth that has been revealed to you and driven the Apostle and yourselves out of your city because you believe in Allah, your Lord?

"If it was indeed to fight for My cause, and out of a desire to please Me that you left your city, how can you be friendly to them in secret? I well know all that you hide and all that you reveal. Whoever of you does this will stray from the right path.

"If they gain ascendancy over you, they will plainly show themselves your enemies, and use their hands and tongues to harm you. They long to see you unbelievers.

"On the Day of Resurrection neither your kinsfolk nor your children shall avail you. Allah will separate you. He is cognizant of all your actions" [al-Mumtahanah: 1x.1-3].

In another instance that shows the grandeur of Islam as a religion of forgiveness and pardon, not a religion of intimidation, terror and tyranny, we see the messenger listening to what 'Abdallah ibn 'Abdallah ibn Abi had to say about his father. He was recalling the falsehoods that his father had spread around the city and the threats he had made against the messenger and the emigrants in an attempt to turn the prophet's supporters against him and plan for civil strife in

their midst. He was giving the people of al-Madinah a reprehensible command: "Let the more powerful in this city drive out the most abject."

The messenger heard this and compared [what the father said with what the son said]. Then he said what Islam would decree.

The messenger heard 'Abdallah ibn 'Abdallah ibn Abi address him: "O Messenger of God, news of my father was reported to me as it was reported to you. He wanted to stir up civil strife, and that is worse than murder. Therefore, punishment would be just for him. If you decree that he is to be punished, do not ask anyone but me to carry out this punishment. I shall bring you his head. By God, no one has been a more dutiful son to his father than I've been. But I fear that you might order someone else to kill him. Please do not let me see my father's killer walking about among people. For should I then kill him, I would be killing a believer for a godless man, and I would then be doomed to the fires of hell."

The messenger issued his sentence: "We will be gentle, and we will associate with him kindly as long as he stays in our midst."

In giving people immunity Islam opposes making people fearful, terrified and guilt-ridden. So much so that Islam would punish in this world and in the hereafter those who are suspicious of people. In fact, Islam made suspicion sinful and determined that one should have evidence to prove he has grounds for suspicion.

Islam also made suspicion defamatory, a charge one cannot escape unless the grounds for suspicion are corroborated. But if the reasons for the suspicion are denied, then the matter is up to God.

"Those that defame honorable women and cannot produce four witnesses shall be given eighty lashes. No testimony of theirs shall be admissible, for they are great transgressors—except those among them that afterwards repent and mend their ways. Allah is forgiving and merciful.

"If a man accuses his wife but has no witnesses except himself, he shall swear four times by Allah that his charge is true, calling down upon himself the curse of Allah if he is lying. But if his wife swears four times by Allah that his charge is false and calls down His curse upon herself if it be true, she shall receive no punishment" [al-Nur: xxiv.4-8].

People are not intimidated, terrified and made to feel guilty in Islam. Islam is conviction, persuasion, faith, commitment and good deeds in this world and in the next.

In fact, Islam relieves people of injustice if they inflict it upon themselves. Not only does Islam accept their penance, but it lightens the burden they voluntarily assume.

Rifa'ah ibn al-Mundhir al-Ansari, alias Abu Libabah committed a major sin. The Jews of the tribe of Qarizah sought his advice, and he advised them to disregard the messenger's judgment of them. He realized his mistake after it was too late. He could not bring himself to face the messenger, and Muslims saw him tied to a

pillar in the mosque. He had sworn to take no food or drink until his death or until God gave him absolution.

Six days went by, and he remained in his position, never leaving it except to go pray. He came close to dying, and then God revealed this noble verse to His messenger:

"Others there are who have confessed their sins; their good works had been intermixed with evil. Perchance Allah will turn to them in mercy. He is forgiving and merciful". [al-Tawbah: ix.102].

After God pardoned him, the man rushed to the messenger of God offering to leave the country where he had committed the sin and to give up all his possessions.

Then the messenger of God said, "You can make up for your sin by giving away one third of your property to charity."

The noble messenger forbade fasting Muslims from spending their days out in the open so they would earn a reward for enduring hardship. He forbade them from doing that because enduring hardship that was not necessary constitutes disobedience of God and His messenger.

The great Imam Abu Hanifah trembles in awe in front of God's mercy and forgiveness. He would not even make a hypothetical judgment that would incriminate people.

Someone stood at his door asking what would be [the fate of] a man who had died drunk and the fate of a woman who had died in a state of adultery.

The imam would not say about them what he knew were God's punishments for consuming alcohol and fornication, but he said what Ibrahim did say about one of these two evils:

"He that follows me shall become my brother, but if anyone turns against me, You are surely forgiving and merciful" [Ibrahim: xiv.36].

He also said what Jesus, the son of Mary, said about one of these two evils:

"They are your own bondsmen: it is for You to punish or to forgive them. You are the Mighty, the Wise One" [al-Ma'idah: v.118].

Abu Dhirr al-Ghafari heard the messenger of God say, "No servant has ever said there was no God but Allah and then died, but he went to heaven."

Abu Dhirr asked, "Even if he had committed fornication and theft?"

And Abu Dhirr heard the prophet say, "Even if he had committed fornication and theft."

Abu Dhirr asked the prophet that question three times, and the noble messenger repeated his answer. The fourth time he added, "Even if he had committed fornication and theft and inspite of Abu Dhirr."

People are harsh upon themselves for the evil deeds they do, but God anticipates them and grants forgiveness.

People are too harsh upon themselves, but the messenger makes matters easier for them. He was sent to be merciful to mankind.

Islam then is not a religion that intimidates and scares people and makes them guilt-ridden. The road to Islam is not one in which people are oppressed into following its course. This is because Islam is a matter of faith, and faith is a matter of commitment. If people commit themselves to what their Islam requires them to do, then the piety of a guardian will be part and parcel of the piety of the subjects.

The end of the long night of alienation and the restoration of the nation to its religion are not what some people think they are. Restoring the nation to its religion is not a mere declaration that an Islamic state has been established; nor is it the drafting of an Islamic constitution and Islamic laws. It would be very easy for a guardian to make such a declaration and for the subjects to accept it. But does this mean that the long night of alienation has come to an end?

The banners of Islam flew over the caliph's palace in Damascus while the messenger's grandchildren were being slaughtered in al-Kufah.

The banners of Islam flew in Baghdad while boys were being dallied with in brothels.

The banners of Islam flew in Granada, Cordoba and Toledo as rulers were wasting the values of Islam and engaging in acts of depravity and dissolution. They became disunited, and they feuded with each other until they were lost and they lost for Islam the glory that faithful Muslims had established for Islam in Spain. Muslims had fought hard to build mosques, and many people in Europe professed that there was no God but Allah and that Muhammad was His messenger.

The banners of Islam flew over the palaces of rulers while Tatarian hordes attacked the bridges of the Tigris and while the resentment of the Christians came to the doors of Jerusalem to settle around the blessed mosque of Allah.

Were those people and the others living under the banners of Islam committed to Islam and its course?

Definitely not. If they had been, they would have been like those who were the nucleus of the Islamic state in al-Madinah: their numbers were smaller and their equipment was less. Had they been committed to Islam, they would have been like the great Islamic state during the days of al-Sadiq and ibn al-Khattab.

With God's will a small group of people overpowered a large group and achieved the miracles of faith: victory in Badr, in Mu'tah, in the War of the Trench and in al-Qadisiyah.

Islam does not consist of flying banners. Islam consists of hearts that display humility when God's name is mentioned.

Islam is not a constitution to be drafted and laws to be enacted. Muslims do not need a constitution; their greatest constitution is the Koran.

The alternative to the night of alienation from Islam is not the proclamation of an Islamic state. It is rather the establishment of an Islamic society. An Islamic society cannot be established by what is imposed on people. It is established by what stems from them. People's conduct has to reflect their faith. Their relations have to be true and for their own sake, regardless of any reward. They have to adhere to the values of the True Religion and not be coerced into them. Each one of them is to watch over himself not over others. Each one of them is to fear God in people: he is not to misguide people, lie to them and hurt them or their property. He is to help the weak and support those who have a right. He is not to put off doing what is right, and he is not to argue about what is wrong. When he makes a promise, he is to keep it. When he makes a pledge, he is to fulfill it. He is not to deny others what he allows for himself, and he is not to go along with people if that would make his God angry. He is to be a good family man and a good neighbor. He should not allow himself and his family the benefits of his property until he does his duty to God first. He is to be charitable to beggars and to those who are deprived; he is to pay the required alms tax, and he is to spend money for the cause of God. He is to consider God in his deeds, giving unto God an equitable portion of his earnings. He is to consider God in himself, and he should not expose himself to humiliation in this life and to torture for eternity. He is not to commit a mortal sin or an evil deed, and he is not to allow himself to do what God has forbidden.

He is to give of his property and of himself for the cause of God. He is to offer himself and his property for the cause of justice in his country. He is to forgive others, for he too seeks the forgiveness of the Forgiving One. He is to be merciful, for he will seek the mercy of the Most Merciful One.

He is to control his wrath and pardon people. He is not to conduct himself in this world with indifference, and he is not to cheapen what belongs to others. He is not to slander others, and he is to avoid being suspicious of others. He is not to kill those whom God forbade us to kill.

A Muslim is someone who does not dread the truth. He does not yield to injustice or acquiesce in it. A Muslim does not yield to injustice because he fears tyranny. A Muslim opposes reprehensible actions by his deeds, and if he cannot do that, then he opposes them verbally. A Muslim does not allow this life to make him forget about the afterlife and the stake he has in it. All good things are permissible. A Muslim is someone who finds no opposition between religion and science. In fact, Islam is a call for knowledge. The first verse of the Koran to be revealed began with the command, "Read!" Our Lord ordered His worshipers to inquire, to think and to reflect.

A Muslim is someone who does not deny or renounce new things. Islam is for all times and all places. Muhammad set the right path for the whole world.

A Muslim is someone who does not hold rigidly to the narrow meaning of a text. Islam comprised the age of its birth and made it possible for all ages to exercise independent opinions.

A Muslim does not acknowledge that there is a priesthood in Islam. In the days of

the messenger any worshiper who devoted himself exclusively to worshipping God was rebuffed. One practices one's religion for the afterlife and for this life.

A Muslim has to know that only his deeds will intercede for him. There is no mediator between him and his Lord. A Muslim has to know that his insights lie in his intuitions. A Muslim fears no one among God's worshipers but the scholars. He is to take from them what his mind can understand, and he is to make matters easy for himself and for others. He is to act like a guardian who is responsible for those who are in his charge would. A Muslim is a guardian even if he looks out after himself only. He is also a guardian if he looks out after his family only. A Muslim is as much of a guardian as though he were responsible for the affairs of all people.

A Muslim is to bid people to do good deeds and forbid them to do evil deeds. He is to appeal to justice, and he is to call upon people and to advise them to observe their religion.

A Muslim realizes that a guardian's responsibility is part and parcel of the subjects' responsibility. He realizes that he would not have been a guardian without the subjects' acknowledgement of his guardianship. If he is fair, then they will have done well by acknowledging him their guardian. If he is not fair and they do not remove him from his position, then they would have helped him be unfair to them and to himself.

These are some of the characteristics of a Muslim who would be part of the Islamic society that is being sought. We are talking about an Islamic society and not an Islamic state. This is because an Islamic society is the foundation upon which an Islamic state is to be built. Without an Islamic society an Islamic state cannot be established.

As I see it, this is the road that ought to be followed. How can we go about it? It is the great beginning of this road that is difficult. It is a road that begins by coming to terms with what the nation had come to in its night of alienation. That is to be followed by an honest evaluation of the difficulty of the road and the magnitude of the hardship. This is the only guarantee against having the matter sidelined and neglected. It is the only guarantee against a shock that could cause us to despair. This is because the nation is facing the accumulated consequences of years of this alienation, and it is facing the reactions of generations and the influences of cultures that have been hostile to us. We have to fight and to make an effort; we have to make progress and not to become isolated; we have to move forward and not to stand still; we have to build for the present with the resources and the circumstances that we have now; and we have to prepare for the future with our own resources without yielding to any pressure.

We have to shape our hopes and our steps into a course and a method of action; and we have to make preparations before we go ahead. We have to stay away from the dangers of unforeseen impulsive actions.

We have to find out the facts about our situation, and we have to strengthen that situation so it can support the towering new structure we are building.

We have to test our means: keeping what does not conflict with our objectives,

being wary about what is not suitable to our objectives and developing what would bring us closer to our objectives.

We have to begin by sowing the seeds, for they are the fruits of the future. We are not to forget those fruits which have been growing, nor are we to forget those that have ripened and matured.

This would put us face to face with new responsibilities in education and in the media.

We have to make people join us in the goals we seek, and we must ask them to contribute to those goals. But we must do that without overburdening them because darkness is like a flame: one cannot see one's way in either of them.

We have to help people get a sense of the consequences of the objective they are seeking through the effects that would be realized. Although limited, these are steps toward that end.

We are not to burden people by what we say. Millions of speeches and sermons proved to be futile during the night of alienation. Instead, we have to ask people for actions whose dimensions they would determine. They are to suggest the means, time the stages and reap the fruits of these actions.

We have to put an end to the tragedy of separating knowledge from work and religion from professional and vocational specialization. The foundation of our new society will have to be the Muslim engineer, the Muslim physician, the Muslim journalist, the Muslim craftsman, the Muslim farmer and the Muslim worker.

This means that all stages of education are to be linked with religion. Religion had been like an island, isolated from all courses of education.

We have to link life with religion so that our mosques would not become crowded during prayer services and empty between prayer services. The mosque should be the place where people get together for purposes that are beneficial to them. The mosque is to be a place of treatment, education and guidance. It is to be a beacon radiating light and an oasis overflowing with blessings.

We have to stop comparing our present with our past when Muslims were powerful with their Islam. We have to stop comparing that past with how weak Muslims have become as a result of their alienation from Islam.

We have to confront the world's currents of thought and various beliefs with Islam. All these are changing, but Islam is constant. All these are ephemeral, but Islam is immortal. All these constitute a split with religion, as though religion were not suitable for the world. Islam, however, is both a religious and a worldly doctrine.

That was a role for a guardian in the context of his method.

What about the guardian in the context of his course?

I may ask [the reader's] permission in setting forth a course for which I do not

take credit. This is because credit for that course goes to the person who guided me to it. Those who seek God's guidance are guided to wisdom.

I spent my youth in this night of alienation, and I experienced in that night of alienation what people experienced. I cannot escape that fact unless I ask for God's pardon and plead for forgiveness from the Forgiving and Merciful One.

I went through what people went through. Then came the guidance of God, and I was rightly guided. After that I reflected upon myself and I wondered.

When people trembled in the hours of alarm, God filled me with tranquillity and I withstood.

I was filled with conviction. I never felt desperate throughout that gloom that led one to despair. I became convinced that ease would follow hardship, and I was saved.

God opened up my heart and made me prosper. He helped me mend my ways. When I found an error in myself I corrected it. Whenever I asked God for something, He responded; and whenever I turned to Him for guidance, He guided me. And when I turned to him in an hour of need, relief was sure to follow.

I thanked God for His blessings, and I praised him for what He gave me. Then I realized that in front of Almighty God I was responsible for the authority he had given me over people.

To say the truth, I spent many sleepless nights tossing and turning wondering how I was to begin.

God guided me to what people thought was an affliction, but it was a blessing.

A radio broadcast service reported a news story about an ambassador who represented Sudan in the capital of a country. The report stated that he was driving his car while under the influence of alcohol. Authorities were therefore forced to make him give up driving the car.

That incident could have slipped by, and it could have ended in having the ambassador summoned and made to answer for his actions in accordance with laws and provisions. However, I reflected on the significance of what had happened. I found myself facing the wisdom of the Great Lawmaker who prohibited Muslims from consuming alcohol. Then I wondered if this ambassador, who is a Muslim, had adhered to the tenets of his religion, would he have placed his country and himself in an embarrassing situation? Would he have compromised himself and his country while he was in a country that viewed him not as an individual but as a symbol representing a people and a state?

Then I asked myself again, "Is alcohol the only thing that God forbade?"

God forbade gambling as well as abominable and reprehensible acts for an undeniably wise reason. He protects people from their own unfairness to others and to themselves. An abominable act affects its perpetrator just as much as it affects others. Gambling is nothing but a weakness and a degradation that puts

a person in a position of perpetrating an injustice if he wins and of being overpowered if he loses. Anyone who becomes addicted to a habit so overpowering cannot usually escape even if he were to spend on that habit his family's earnings or even if he were to steal. Reprehensible acts are those acts that God and people censure in others.

Permitting forbidden acts constitutes aggression and hostility. It discredits men, and no man can be perfect if he is a slave to his appetites.

Then I asked myself once again, "How can I entrust a few people with the affairs of the Sudanese people when they do not observe the rules of God and they do not refrain from what He prohibited?"

Every person is subject to what he gained. But what are the barriers that separate a person's responsibility to himself from his responsibility to others? If he strays from the right path, if he influences people and does not give them their due rights, then he becomes a role model for people because of his position in their midst. If he strays from the right path, the weak will stray from the right path too. If he is righteous, he shows them the right path ahead, and they use him as an example and follow his way.

He himself may be led astray and become unfair to the people. How can we expect a person who drinks alcohol to be competent? How can we expect a gambler to be honest? How can we trust anyone who does not observe sanctions to look after people's interests and their inviolable objects? I put my trust in God.

I classified people according to their positions, and I chose those who were in the highest positions and those who were closest to the people's interests. I sent each one of them a letter whose text follows:

"In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate: Alif lam mim. These are the revelations of the wise Book, a guide and a blessing to the righteous, who attend to their prayers, pay the alms-tax, and firmly believe in the life to come. These are rightly guided by their Lord and will surely prosper" [Luqman: xxxi.1-5].

"Inspire me, Lord, to render thanks for the favors You have bestowed on me and on my parents, and to do good works that will please You. Admit me, through Your mercy, among Your righteous servants" [al-Naml: xxvii.19].

The messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him salvation said, "The charge has been revealed and implanted deep in the hearts of men. Then they learned from the Koran and then from the Tradition."

The inimitable universality of Islam as a religion and a doctrine is manifested in the fact that it encompasses preceding doctrines and religions. Islam recognizes the messages that had been preached by [previous] prophets and messengers.

Although the universality of Islam comprises what preceded it, its letter and its spirit preclude additions that would damage its principles. But this does not prohibit people from exercising their independent opinions in the context of the Koran and the Tradition and what the illiterate prophet, may God bless him and

grant him salvation, decreed in his life and in his government. This is considered a legacy for those bearing the trust in all times and all places.

The charge in the messenger's course and method, may God bless him and grant him salvation, lay in the example and model he set and followed.

The prophet rebelled against what was inherited when he refused to worship idols that were nothing but stones that can do neither harm nor good. In the social sense these idols were symbols that differed but did not form a homogeneous group. Thus with his rebellion, his call to worship God and his effort the prophet liberated the will of man from the restrictions of a narrow affiliation to a brotherhood under God with affection and mercy. In the context of such a brotherhood it is people's duty to associate with each other.

The charge in the messenger's course and method, may God bless him and grant him salvation, lay in what people found in him.

He was never contemptuous of what was right; he never argued about something that was wrong and he never showed off his power. Nor did he take advantage of the weak because they were weak. In fact, the prophet would support the powerful until he could take one's due from them, and he supported the weak until he could get their rights for them. In his law love was not synonymous with favoritism. He preferred his nation to his tribe, and he preferred his family to himself. The only advantage a non-Arab could have over an Arab was his piety. He never played favorites with people because of their noble descent, marriage relationship or wealth. To him all people were equal like the teeth of a comb: they had equal rights and equal obligations.

It was the charge that people found in the messenger's course and method, may God bless him and grant him salvation.

He was tolerant and merciful; he spoke no evil, and he committed no evil. He was just and firm in his judgments; he fulfilled his vows and kept his promises. He was humble without being servile; he was capable without being a braggart; he was forbearing without being negligent; and he curbed his own passions. He never urged his subjects to do anything that he did not urge himself to do. He never kept any profits to himself, nor did he covet what he did not deserve. He never took a step unless it was for a reason, and he never gave up on what he had intended unless he had a reason. He did not look down upon advice, and he did not look down upon consultation. He examined himself before he examined others. He did not deal with his mistakes by denying them or by resorting to litigation. Instead, he always regretted those mistakes.

These are reflections on the life of a prophet who fulfilled his charge and assumed responsibility for its consequences. He struggled with himself before struggling for his mission. He thus scored a victory for a nation that was fragmented and divided before he came along.

With what was revealed to him the prophet advocated contemplating the creation of the heavens and the earth. He also advocated personal reflection as one's initiation into accepting the charge: the charge of believing in what was ordered by the laws and the closest of religions [to mankind]; the charge of a guardian

who is responsible for his subjects, not because of what he expects from them, but because of what he represents for them. To those who are in his charge a guardian's conduct and morals set an example and serve as a model.

Although our status and our prestige is less than that of the messenger, that is not an excuse for not looking up to his course and his method, may God bless him and grant him salvation. The messenger is considered the model of perfection we aspire to and seek for ourselves. We are to look up to the example he sets before we fault others for their failure to achieve that ambition.

I had announced more than once that a man in the public eye belongs to the public.

I had also cautioned that leaders were in a position where they could be observed and censured. I said that their performance and the errors in performance they make while in office and even the mistakes or errors they make in private were not above such observation and censure. This is because errors in a leader's conduct are sins in what they reflect and suggest to those in lower positions who see them as complementary to what the leader attained instead of detracting from it.

The charge is indivisible because adhering to virtue in what one says and what one does; having a vigilant conscience, a pure heart and a clear mind; and being competent are those components that complement each other in a leader who can carry out the charge and assume responsibility for its consequences. The absence of any one of these components detracts from a leader's ability and distorts the example that he ought to set regardless of his good intentions and efforts.

Inasmuch as I am human, however, I would not infringe upon what lies hidden in people's hearts, but I will not be neutral on what is obvious and concrete. Therefore I can no longer find an excuse for myself for accepting any deviations in conduct among those who assist me. This is because I will not be placed in a position where I would have to choose between forgiveness and litigation. Therefore, the choice that a Muslim leader has to make is this: he should either have the ability to overcome his own passions, or he should have the courage to step aside.

Over a period of 2 weeks starting now, there will be enough time to think about and reflect upon these two choices.

This man can either make a pledge and a promise to avoid alcohol and smiliar substances and eschew other inadequacies as well, or he is to decline participating in carrying the charge and assuming its responsibilities. I would then accept his resignation.

It is after I receive that man's reply and not before that I will be watching those who are true to their pledge and those who break their promises. I will stand up for the former, and with the latter I will be true to my faith, my people and my conscience. I will place them where they themselves wanted to be: far away from the charge and its responsibilities. God guides whomever He wishes to the right path.

I received an answer to what I had asked for. All but one person pledged they

would adhere to the right path. That person said in no uncertain terms that he could not adhere to what I was asking. Therefore, I relieved him of his responsibilities. That was the condition I had set, and that was his choice.

The days went by, and I watched the results of what I had done. So far I cannot swear with certainty that those who gave me their pledge have been adhering to it. But I can see, and people can see that with me, that those modes of conduct which used to be customary have disappeared. What used to be done and vaunted in public has disappeared. Those values that deemed the consumption of alcohol to be civilized behavior, gambling a sport and permitting forbidden acts to be intelligent and smart have disappeared. The prevalence of those values went beyond those people I had referred to in my letter. These new values applied to those in lower positions. I am talking here about what is evident. Only God knows what people hide in their hearts and do in private.

Nonetheless, it would not be right to say that people have refrained from actions that God forbade. But they have at least turned from doing these acts in public to doing them in private. They've turned from vaunting them to concealing them. That is a step in the right direction. In fact, matters have gone beyond that, thank God. People now evaluate those who look after their affairs on the basis of these standards, and they ask that people be made to answer for their actions on that basis.

I recall receiving a letter in my mail informing me that a senior leader was still engaged in his old ways and that he was consuming alcohol and committing acts that had been forbidden. To say the truth, I refused to believe that because the person who was being referred to in that letter was until recently standing next to me praying. He never stopped thanking God for the blessings He had bestowed upon him, for God had blessed him with the letter I had addressed to him [among others], and he had therefore refrained from those actions that displeased God, people and his family. [He said] he had settled down and had become more faithful and more pious. How could I not believe what I saw with my own eyes, and how can I investigate a charge that may have had an ulterior motive behind it? It was impossible for me to doubt and suspect him. I also hated to investigate the matter and thereby disobey God's command. For God had commanded people not to spy on each other. I entrusted this matter to God, thinking that if he had been unjust, then he would have betrayed his word and my trust. I asked God for guidance; I asked Him to let me know if what that man showed in public was the same that he showed in private. The days went by, and the caution that man observed failed to guard his secret. He was not able to engage in his old habits privately, for he had become accustomed to the company of disreputable people. The truth about him was revealed; his secret was exposed; and he was removed from office.

Then there was someone I had asked about, and I was told he was indisposed. I went to see him and I came back from my visit convinced that his problem had something to do with alcohol. He was not able to hide the odor of alcohol that reeked from his breath. I asked that he be questioned about this matter, and he did not deny it although he claimed that he had been consuming alcohol for therapeutic reasons. I relieved him of his responsibilities.

I am not so unmindful as to claim that everyone who made a pledge kept it and

everyone who made a promise fulfilled it. God knows what secrets people harbor in their hearts.

I hold people accountable for what they show. On the Day of Reckoning God will hold people accountable for what they show and what they conceal in their hearts.

I was, however, baffled by that man who was the only one to say that he could not promise to refrain from consuming alcohol. A few weeks had hardly gone by before he gave up alcohol. I asked that he be questioned about the reason why he had refused to give me his promise.

He said that he was not certain he could keep his promise. He said he was afraid of adding to [the sin of] disobedience that of betraying a trust. Therefore, he had declined to make a promise.

I asked that he be reinstated in his former position, but he declined lest his renunciation of alcohol would be attributed by others to his removal from office. I admired him for that, and I will continue to admire him.

What I wanted to say in the preceding paragraphs is that it is the responsibility of a guardian to set an example for those who are in his charge. He represents what people would like for themselves. If he is righteous, people of all ranks and grades beneath him will be righteous too. This is particularly true when a guardian's words are consistent with his deeds and when his intentions are sound and true.

I do not wish to say that this is the beginning and the end of the road. It is only a step on a long road. A guardian has to persevere on that road side by side with the people and by means of them. He is not to walk so far ahead of them that they despair of ever catching up with him, nor is he to lag behind them causing them to lose sight of their guide and mentor. Instead, he is to encourage them, pave the way for them and help them strive to build an Islamic society which is for them and of them.

God does not change the affairs of a nation until the people of that nation change themselves. It should be enough for them that He tames their souls, offers them help, paves the way for them and adheres to a course, the course of a guardian who believes that a guardian's righteousness is part and parcel of the righteousness of those who are in his charge.

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